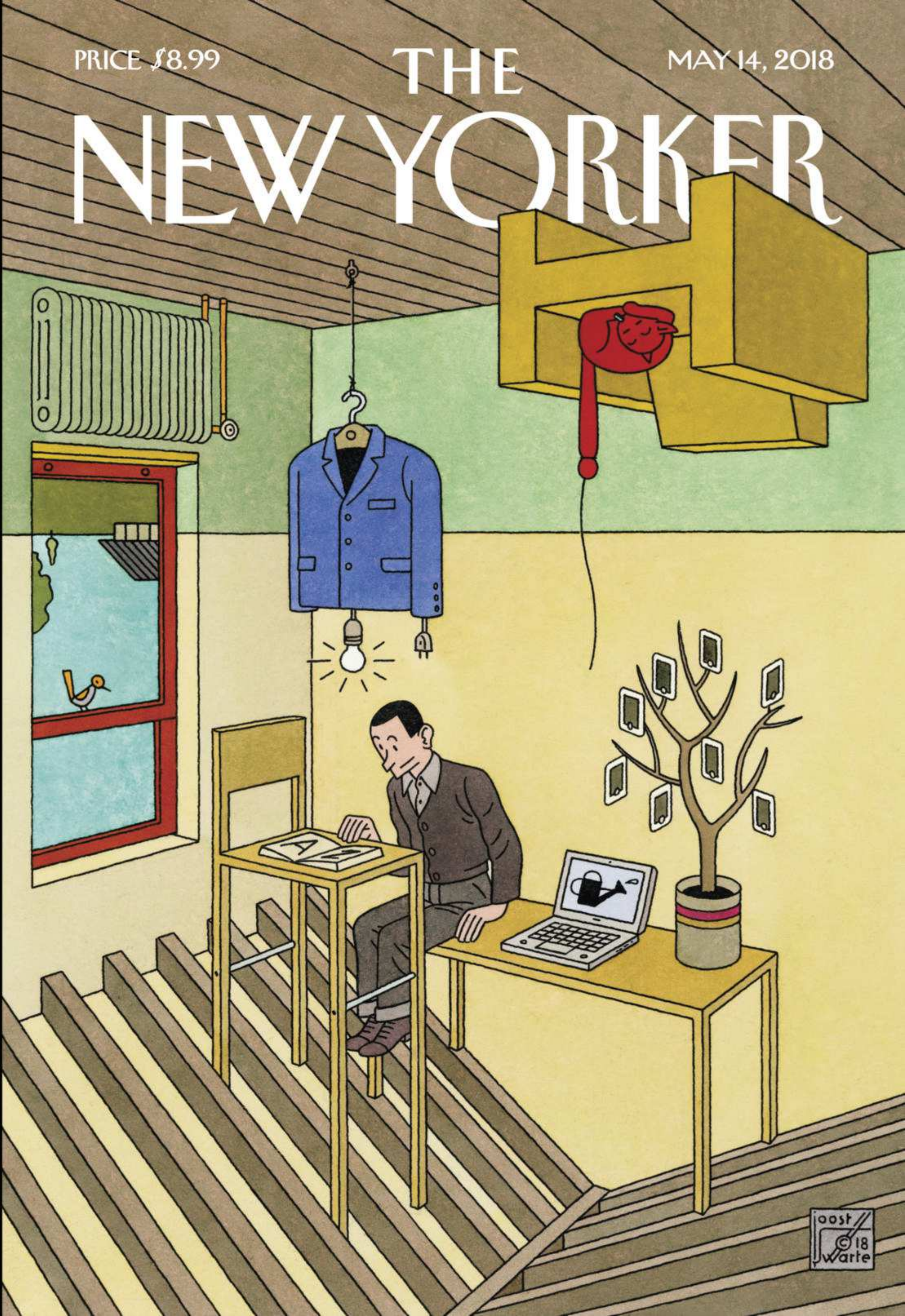
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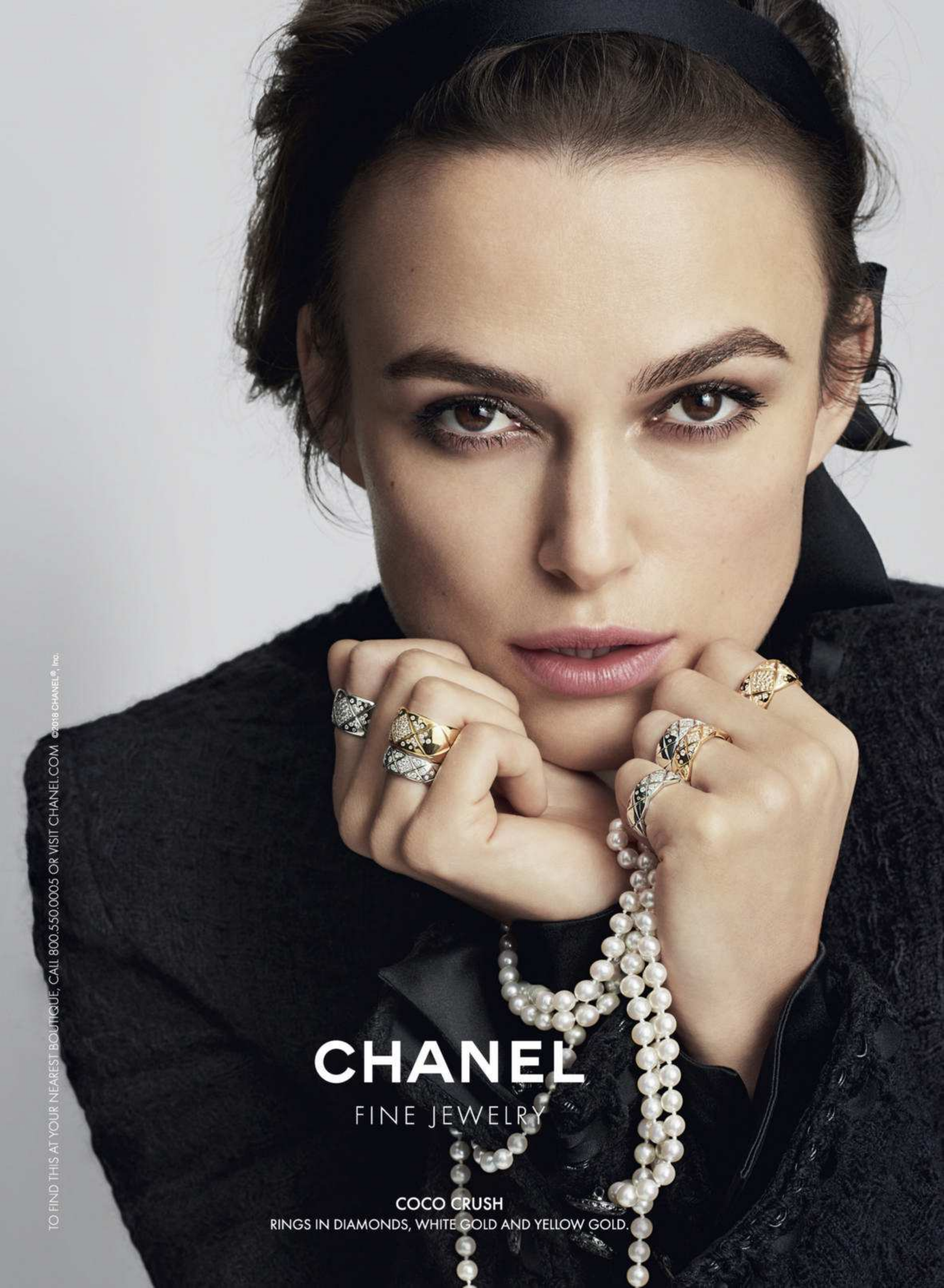
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THE NEW YORKER

THE INNOVATORS ISSUE

MAY 14, 2018

DRAWINGS *Amy Hwang, David Sipress, Pia Guerra, Carolita Johnson, Frank Cotham, Victoria Roberts, P. C. Vey, Edward Koren, Zachary Kanin, William Haefeli, Drew Dernavich, Roz Chast, Charlie Hankin, Joe Dator, Emma Hunsinger, Benjamin Schwartz, Pat Byrnes, Nick Downes, Jon Adams* SPOTS *Joost Swarte*


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CONTRIBUTORS

Emily Nussbaum (*"Mr. Big," p. 52*) is the magazine's television critic and the recipient of the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for criticism.

Hua Hsu (*Pop Music, p. 98*), a staff writer, is the author of "A Floating Chinaman: Fantasy and Failure Across the Pacific."

Casey N. Cep (*Books, p. 84*) is the author of the forthcoming book "Furious Hours: Harper Lee and an Unfinished Story of Race, Religion, and Murder in the Deep South."

Joost Swarte (*Cover*) recently published "New York Book," a collection of more than four hundred and fifty documents, illustrations, and sketches he has contributed to the magazine since 1995.

Lauren Collins (*The Talk of the Town, p. 34*), a staff writer, is the author of "When in French: Love in a Second Language."

Caleb Crain (*Books, p. 90*) is the author of "American Sympathy" and "Necessary Errors."

Jelani Cobb (*"The Southern Strategist," p. 68*) teaches in the journalism program at Columbia University.

Edwidge Danticat (*Fiction, p. 76*) is the author of many books, including, most recently, "The Art of Death."

Christian Wiman (*Poem, p. 80*) teaches at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music. He published "Hammer Is the Prayer: Selected Poems" in 2016.

Sophie Brickman (*The Talk of the Town, p. 33*) is a writer and editor living in New York City. She has contributed to the *Times*, *Saveur*, and *The California Sunday Magazine*.

Jesse Eisenberg (*Shouts & Murmurs, p. 43*) is a playwright, an actor, and the author of "Bream Gives Me Hiccups."

Liana Finck (*Sketchbook, p. 61*) has been contributing cartoons to the magazine since 2013. Her first graphic novel, "A Bintel Brief," was published in 2014. Her second, "Passing for Human," will come out in September.

Jia Tolentino (*"The Vapors," p. 36*) is a staff writer. Previously, she was the deputy editor at Jezebel and a contributing editor at the Hairpin.

Tad Friend (*"Superior Intelligence," p. 44*), a staff writer since 1998, is the author of the memoir "Cheerful Money" and the essay collection "Lost in Mongolia."

Amy Davidson Sorkin (*Comment, p. 29*), a staff writer, is a regular contributor to Comment. She also writes a column for newyorker.com.

Anthony Lane (*The Current Cinema, p. 100*) has been a film critic for the magazine since 1993.

Sharon Olds (*Poem, p. 57*) is the author of the poetry collection "Stag's Leap," which was recently produced as a staged reading by the Salt Lake City Acting Company.

Peter Schjeldahl (*The Art World, p. 96*), the magazine's art critic, is the author of "Let's See: Writings on Art from *The New Yorker*."

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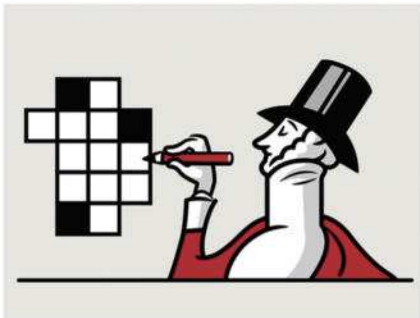
DAILY SHOUTS

Alexander Dragan and Jason Adam Katzenstein collaborate on a comic about an impossible Q. & A.



DISPATCH

E. Tammy Kim reports on whether Arizona teachers can still consider themselves middle class.

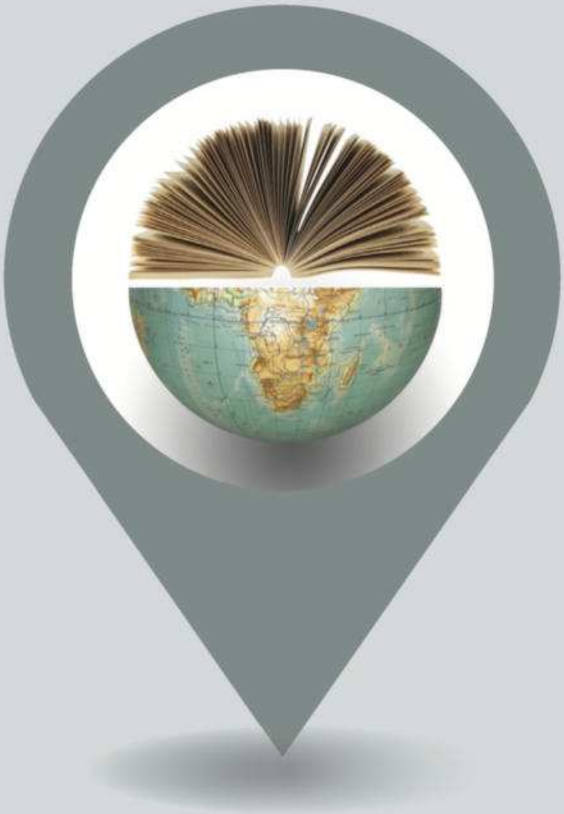


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THE MAIL

WHEN YOU CAN BUY LOVE

Elif Batuman wrote a fascinating article on the Japanese industry of rental relatives and family members ("A Theory of Relativity," April 30th). It would be easy to find this concept amusing or sad, but we in the West should be asking how we can build on it. For example, an innovative program for seniors in Florida, called Papa, offers "grandkids on demand." It recognizes that good paid caregivers often act as surrogate grandchildren when no one else can or will.
Michael Zablocki
Torrance, Calif.

Batuman's piece left me deeply unsettled. She suggests that transactional relationships can represent unconditional love because of their unambiguous nature—but all rent-a-person experiences are predicated on one person having the financial resources to hire another. Further, the phenomenon of transference is well documented in psychotherapy literature, and if it occurs—as it seems to in these rental relationships—the therapist generally either works through it with the client or finds a different therapist to serve her client's needs. In the case of Family Romance—a business that rents actors to play a person's family or friends—when a client becomes too attached to his rental family the relationship is sometimes terminated. What impact does that have on a client's psyche? On a societal scale, loneliness, bullying, grief because of loss, discrimination, and social isolation cannot be solved with transactional relationships. They should be addressed through social programs dedicated to improving people's lives.
Elena Maydan, M.D.
Bronx, N.Y.

Batuman quotes a critic who compares rental families to "virtual families," and it does indeed seem that the idea behind both is that it's possible for people to take comfort in something beyond themselves, and maybe even beyond their reality. It may be common and acceptable for a person to seek comfort from a pet during a stressful period—essentially buying a creature to provide one with love—but hiring a real person to offer solace still doesn't seem like the healthiest solution. And yet Batuman makes clear that the difference between the unconditional support that one would receive from an actor or a family member (theoretically so different) is often indiscernible.
Jessica Cordova
Los Angeles, Calif.

The most ethically troubling aspect of Japan's rent-a-family industry is not that paid actors provide companionship and affection normally given by family members for free. It's that so many of the actors must not only impersonate family members but also lie about their identity, so that outsiders—and sometimes parents, spouses, and even children—think they are who they pretend to be. This is a salient difference from the services of a masseuse or a therapist, which are paid for but don't require deception.
Phillip Cary
St. Davids, Pa.

Family Romance represents a society that is fighting to re-create the past, rather than one that is adapting to the future. Imagine a warbler finch wearing a fake beak to fit in with ground finches—it would be absurd. The business, like any other, is providing a service in response to a market demand. But its success demonstrates that the standards that created the demand are outdated. Japan's average marriage age has gone up five years since 1970, and single-parent households are increasingly common. What purpose is there to reinforcing societal standards of the past that depress society today?
Victoria Vouloumanos
Los Angeles, Calif.

LEAR IN SOVIET RUSSIA

I was thrilled to read Adam Gopnik's article about Edward Lear (Books, April 23rd). As with much else in the Soviet Union, there was not too much choice on children's bookshelves. But, thanks to the brilliant translations of Samuil Marshak, Lear's poetry is as familiar to Russian children of the Soviet era as Lewis Carroll's Alice is to Americans. Marshak was an absolute genius of translation, and he managed to transpose all of Lear's charm, melancholy, and what G. K. Chesterton once called "lyric insanity" into Russian. As a result, Lear's nonsense helped shape the consciousness of children in a very rigid culture.

Marshak's translations sound so natural to the Russian ear that many of Lear's phrases have become integrated into everyday speech. It's not uncommon to hear someone muttering in frustration, "All around us disorder reigns. Everything in this world is too much!" without realizing they are quoting Lear in translation. Marshak adjusted minor details in order to preserve the rhythm, the tone, and the emotional charge of Lear's poetry. The result is amazingly true to the original.

In Russia these days, there is no lack of choice on the bookshelves, and fewer people read Lear. But I read Marshak's translations to my children, and I introduce his Lear to other Russian-speaking families. Recently, I taught a class on Lear to kids. We read "The Owl and the Pussycat," and then made boats out of coconut shells, benches from ice-cream sticks, and honey jars from wine corks. I think Lear would approve.
Tanya Petrova
New Providence, N.J.

EDITORS' NOTE:
The illustration for Dan Chiasson's "The Hungry I" (May 7th) shows a different writer named Jenny Xie, not the poet whose début collection, "Eye Level," is reviewed.

•

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MAY 9 – 15, 2018

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



Pope Francis may favor basic black footwear and plain white cotton garb, but for centuries the Vatican has been synonymous with jewel-encrusted, ermine-trimmed opulence. On May 10, the Met's Costume Institute opens the exhibition **"Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination,"** in which modern designs share top billing with papal robes and accessories on loan from the Sistine Chapel sacristy, including an embroidered chasuble (above) made for Pius IX in the mid-nineteenth century.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PARI DUKOVIC

NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors lead complicated lives; it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.

Bombino
Omara Moctar acquired his Italianate stage name when he was a precocious student of the guitar in Agadez, the largest city in central Niger and the home of just over a hundred thousand of his fellow-Tuaregs. As a diminutive teen-ager, he was comfortable playing with musicians whose age and experience far surpassed his own, an early prowess that two decades later helps explain the Jimi Hendrix comparisons as his star continues to rise beyond the African continent. While "Nomad," his raucous 2013 breakthrough album, was produced by Dan Auerbach, of the Black Keys, his more recent music puts his sun-parched riffs to work in a synthesis he calls "Tuareggae." "Deran," his forthcoming album, reveals a style of West African blues that invites in even more of the diaspora. *(Brooklyn Bowl, 61 Wythe Ave., Brooklyn. 718-963-3369. May 9.)*

"Dream Machine"
In 1961, the late British artist Brion Gysin manufactured the Dream Machine, a mass-producible strobe light that he described as "the world's first work of art designed to be viewed with eyes closed." Intended to enhance tripping, it consisted of a large cylinder with geometric cutouts on the outside and a light bulb within, which could be set atop the spinning chassis of a turntable. Gysin imagined the resulting pulses of light as it spun stimulating the optic nerve and encouraging mild hallucinations. This immersive concert installation turns Pioneer Works into a massive Dream Machine. **Dave Harrington,** an evocative noisemaker and multi-instrumentalist with the electronic duo Darkside, and the Australian vocalist **Sophia Brous** assemble an all-star lineup of improvisers to jam amid high-intensity strobes and ceiling projections. The **Master Musicians of Jajouka,** a legendary Sufi-trance troupe from Morocco, are at the center of a bill that features the electric harpist **Zeena Parkins,** the percussionist **Greg Fox,** the bassist **Trevor Dunn,** and one of the founders of industrial music, and a onetime Gysin collaborator, **Genesis Breyer P-Orridge,** of Throbbing Gristle and Psychic TV fame. *(159 Pioneer St., Brooklyn. pioneerworks.org. May 11.)*

Fever Ray
The Swedish singer-songwriter Karin Dreijer comes into clearer focus with each project. She hid behind masks and obscured her voice with pitch-shifting effects when she was with the Knife, an electronic outfit she helmed, alongside her brother Olof, from 1999 to 2014. She let the audience in a little bit in 2009 with the eponymous début of her solo project, Fever Ray, which featured lyrics that touched on relatable topics like domestic anxiety. Now she's upping the intimacy even more. "Plunge," Fever Ray's 2017 release, finds her unabashedly embracing her queerness and the power of carnal pleasures. The accompanying tour aims for rapture amid a circus-like atmosphere: Dreijer, makeup-smeared and gleeful, is the debauched ringleader of a cast of costumed players. *(Brooklyn Hangar, 2 52nd St., Brooklyn. 718-492-0800. May 12-13.)*

The Perceptionists
Contrary to what the airwaves tell us, trap, the animated style of rap currently flaunting its popularity, hasn't completely killed hip-hop's conscience. In Boston, the m.c.s Mr. Lif and Akrobatik (Jeffrey Haynes and Jared Bridgeman) have maintained the thoughtful, humane, uncompromising personas that first got them noticed, in the early two-thousands. Both separately and as the Perceptionists, they've consistently checked in with solid beats to match verses like the one from the opening track of "Resolution," their album from last year, in which Mr. Lif rhymes "local farmer" with "Big Pharma" and "big armor"—the kind that has become synonymous with overzealous policing. At this show, the duo's topicality will provide inspiration for their partisans. *(The Kingsland, 269 Norman Ave., Brooklyn. 718-383-1900. May 10.)*

Tristan Perich: "Drift Multiply"
The New York sound artist Perich tends to work in miniature. His celebrated album "1-Bit Symphony" came housed in a CD's plastic jewel case, minus the CD—in its place stood a loop of wires, a lithium battery, and a microchip hosting Perich's electronic compositions. (To hear the retro-futurist music box, a listener plugs headphones right into the case.) With his show "Drift Multiply," he dramatically inflates his template. Said to have been a decade in gestation, the piece conjoins fifty one-bit speakers and an equal number of flesh-and-blood violinists. The contrast between primitive electronics and classically trained humans may seem stark, yet Perich aims to celebrate the shared vibrations inherent to both speakers and strings. In what may seem an even less likely pairing, the concert is a joint presentation of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine and the Red Bull Music Academy. *(Cathedral of St. John the Divine, 1047 Amsterdam Ave. stjohndivine.org. May 9.)*

Power Trip
Thrash, the extreme subgenre of heavy metal that bloomed in the eighties alongside Metallica's rise to superstardom, doesn't exactly demand innovation. The traditional recipe of chugging low-register riffs, propulsive drumming, and shredded, sweep-picked solos tends to work every time. And yet it still has the potential to be breathtaking. Power Trip, from Dallas, is among the style's most accomplished modern exponents. During the past ten years, the band has become a fine-tuned instrument engineered to bludgeon. The music is pure hesher fantasy: loud, well-crafted songs completely shorn of fat. Thrash mavens who arrive early will get to headbang along with the Philly rockers **Sheer Mag.** Ear protection is strongly recommended. *(Elsewhere, 599 Johnson Ave., Brooklyn. elsewherebrooklyn.com. May 9-10.)*

Rolling Blackouts Coastal Fever
On the strength of two EPs and a couple of shiny new singles, this Melbourne, Australia, quintet has rapidly galvanized listeners committed to the sunny churn and jangle of indie rock. But that sweetness can be deceptive. There's bitterness lurking just beneath the surface of "French Press," the title track of the second EP, even if its fleetness and forward motion—exemplified by chiming guitars against a driving backbeat—are an invitation to pay no mind to its lyrics about disconnection. "Mainland," one of the singles from "Hope Downs," the band's first full-length album, due in June from Sub Pop, is a veiled meditation on the refugee crisis in Europe, penned by the singer-guitarist Tom Russo while on a visit to the Aeolian Islands, his ancestral home, off the coast of Sicily. Will New Yorkers identify with the lyric "Back on the mainland, the chimps were coming up trumps"? *(Rough Trade, 64 N. 9th St., Brooklyn. roughtradenyc.com. May 12.)*

Jorja Smith
Several years ago, this acclaimed singer-songwriter would sometimes disappear into the stockroom at her coffee-shop workplace, where she'd hurriedly record voice memos with lyrics she'd dreamed up (and occasionally practice fielding mock interview questions from music journalists). The work paid off. Since 2016, the London-based musician has amassed a global following with her luminous tunes, which range from soul-imbued reflections on police brutality, as on her first single, "Blue Lights," to shimmery pop numbers that include collaborations with the likes of Drake. "I Am" was handpicked by Kendrick Lamar for the soundtrack to "Black Panther." Smith also has a knack for conveying gnarled universal truths that become more revelatory with each listen, which is especially evident in "Teenage Fantasy," a woozy tale of young love gone sour. Smith will perform at Brooklyn Steel in anticipation of the June release of her début album, "Lost & Found." *(319 Frost St., Brooklyn. 888-929-7849. May 12.)*

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Bill Charlap
There's a deep soul in the machine that is the Bill Charlap Trio, a precision engine that mates the lyrical and expressive pianist with his joined-at-the-hip partners, the bassist **Peter Washington** and the drummer **Kenny Washington.** A special treat finds Charlap playing solo at an early set. *(Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. 212-581-3080. May 8-19.)*

Steve Coleman and Five Elements
It's fairly amazing—or a sign of the times—that the visionary saxophonist, composer, MacArthur fellow, and bandleader Coleman has managed to sustain an outsized reputation as an influential musical figurehead while having a hair's-breadth presence as a recording artist on independent labels. This latest version of his ever-evolving Five Elements band includes the trumpeter **Jonathan Finlayson** and the wordsmith **Kokayi.** *(Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. May 8-13.)*

Fred Hersch Duos
When it comes to intimate duets, the pianist Hersch, a brilliant soloist and a dynamic trio head, is also the perfect host. In what has become a highlight of the jazz year, Hersch will find common ground with special guests; this year's partners include the clarinettist **Anat Cohen,** the singer **Kate McGarry,** and the bassist and vocalist **Esperanza Spalding.** *(Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. May 8-13.)*

Russ Lossing and Cameron Brown
The merest kernel of melody can set the pianist Lossing off on an exploratory whirl, improvising with the daring of a wire-walker. This adventurous, creative musician duets with an equally quick-thinking veteran, the acclaimed bassist Brown. *(Mezzrow, 163 W. 10th St. mezzrow.com. May 14.)*

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MOVIES



Michel Recanati (right), a young political organizer working with the veteran activists Henri Weber and Alain Krivine, is the subject of "Half a Life."

Spring Awakening

Two New York theatres commemorate France's May, 1968, political activism.

The gaudy bio-pic "Godard Mon Amour" got one thing right: France's May, 1968, uprising was a filmmakers' revolution, inspired in part by the French New Wave and inspiring, in turn, a new generation of filmmakers who both took part in it and filmed it. For the fiftieth anniversary of the often mythologized events, Metrograph and French Institute Alliance Française present programs that reveal the documentary fervor and artistic imagination that arose from the ferment of the time. They show the exciting promise of rapid change, the misery of shattered dreams, and the physical violence and emotional damage that activists endured.

The anonymously and collectively made documentary "U.U.U." (a French acronym for "factory-university union"), from 1968, looks closely at the events of that May, starting with protests by students, a fiery speech by one of their leaders, and the overwhelming violence of the police response. (It plays May 28 in the Metrograph series.) But the main focus of "U.U.U." is on the labor strikes that virtually paralyzed French industry and that, unlike the student protests, threatened the Gaullist regime. The film shows radical activists demanding regime change in France; instead, at the end of the month, unions accepted the government's offer of raises and reforms and returned to work—and French politics largely got back to business as usual.

What activists did next is the story of a 1982 personal documentary by Romain Goupil, "Half a Life" ("Mourir à Trente Ans," literally, "To Die at Age Thirty"), which may be the greatest film about the era. (It screens May 29 at French Institute Alliance Française.) It's a dual portrait of Goupil and his closest friend, Michel Recanati, and a personal view of French leftism of the time. The son of a movie technician, Goupil had been making films since childhood, and "Half a Life" includes clips from some of them—sardonically playful comedies from the mid-sixties and subsequent documentaries of protests. He and Recanati organized a group of left-wing revolutionary high-school students who, in 1968, pushed the university-centered student movement into ever more daring actions; Recanati, a gifted orator, was the group's leader.

Goupil and Recanati considered the events of May a "dress rehearsal" for a worker-led revolution and continued to plan direct political actions (such as vandalizing foreign embassies), but, in 1969, Goupil, fed up with full-time political organizing, got a job in the movie business (and planned to make a film about the revolt). In 1973, after leading an attack on a neo-Nazi meeting, Recanati went into exile, returned to France, and was imprisoned for several months. Then, in 1978, after enduring a series of personal crises, he committed suicide. "Half a Life" reflects the glories and the failures of the era's political passions—the exalted but impersonal dream of revolution and the redemptive devotion to artistic creation. In the film, Goupil (who is still making movies) says that, because of his intense activism in 1968, he ignored the era's cultural aspect—which quickly displaced politics as the era's most enduring legacy.

—*Richard Brody*

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NOW PLAYING

An Autumn Afternoon
The fatal bargain of old age has rarely been observed as sharply as in Yasujiro Ozu's last film, from 1962. It's centered on Hirayama, a Tokyo businessman and widower whose grown daughter, Michiko, keeps house for him. Their settled routine is disrupted by his plainspoken friend, Kawai, who urges him to find Michiko a suitable husband and spare her a life as an old maid. Hirayama's growing acceptance of his solitude is challenged by the late-life happiness of another friend, Horie, a sly fox who is married to a much younger woman. His serenity is also troubled by a barroom encounter with a former wartime shipmate, whose maudlin reminiscences spark jingoistic bombast and earnest regret. With the bright colors of new urban landscapes (built up in the wake of wartime destruction) and the brazen clash of calmly assertive compositions, Ozu captures the ordinary desolation at the natural heart of things—and contemplates his own place on the edge of the precipice. In Japanese.—*Richard Brody (Quad Cinema, May 11 and May 14, and streaming.)*

Avengers: Infinity War
Behold, the latest monster of a movie to lumber forth from the Marvel stables. This one is directed by Joe and Anthony Russo, and stars pretty much every actor that the studio could round up. Robert Downey, Jr., returns as Iron Man, Tom Holland is Spider-Man, Chadwick Boseman is Black Panther, Elizabeth Olsen is Scarlet Witch, Benedict Cumberbatch is Dr. Strange, Zoe Saldana is Gamora, Chris Hemsworth is Thor, Tom Hiddleston is the nefarious Loki, and so on. Mark Ruffalo is back, too, as Hulk, although he has immense difficulty turning angry and green, and may need to consult the appropriate physician. Ant-Man should be somewhere, but he may have been trodden underfoot. The plot is the usual small-scale, everyday affair: there are six Infinity Stones available to collect, and a mountainous thug named Thanos (Josh Brolin) wants them all, with a view to commanding the cosmos. The effort to stop him takes two and a half hours, though it seems considerably longer, and the climactic battle is set in Wakanda, which appears to be, in every sense, where the money is. The threat of a sequel seems all too real.—*Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 5/7/18.) (In wide release.)*

Before Summer Ends
The Swiss director Maryam Goormaghtigh reinvigorates the summertime road-trip genre with this lyrical, keenly observed, acutely political comedy. It stars three thirtysomething Iranian men living in Paris, named Arash, Hossein, and Ashkan—nonprofessional actors playing versions of themselves—who take a sentimental journey two weeks before Arash moves back to Iran. Hossein, who is married, is a floppy-haired, ironic, artsy type; the earnest and solitary Ashkan works in photography; and Arash is a socially awkward, obese student who, as a teen-ager in Iran, deliberately gained weight to avoid military service—which he's still hoping to avoid when he goes home. As the men motor through the French countryside en route to the Mediterranean Sea, they chat about Iran and France, tradition and freedom, memories and aspirations (heightened by visions of Iranian landscapes). They also meet people along the way—notably, two musicians, Charlotte and Michèle, whose presence prompts Ashkan's dreams of romance. Then the idyll is shattered by new political circumstances. Goormaghtigh made the film with a few thousand dollars and one assistant, but her poised, ample images and her wryly tender regard for her characters give the film dramatic grandeur to match its global embrace. In Farsi and French.—*R.B. (Museum of the Moving Image, May 11.)*

The Day After
The South Korean director Hong Sang-soo infuses this impulsively romantic melodrama with the ironic echoes of comedy. Bongwan (Kwon Hae-hyo), the middle-aged head of a small Seoul publishing house, has been having an affair with his assistant, a young woman named Changsook (Kim Sae-byuk). Heartbroken after she leaves him, Bongwan—still in need of office help—hires another young woman, Areum (Kim Min-hee). During Areum's first day on the job, Bongwan's wife, Haejoo (Cho Yun-hee), barges into the office, certain that Bongwan has been having an affair with his assistant, and mistakes Areum for his lover. Hong tells the story in long and dialogue-filled takes, done in a soft black-and-white that feels like pencil drawings, to extract deep and earnest confessions with a graceful touch that shudders with the life-shaking emotions at their core. (Those emotions also burst forth physically, with violence and drunken frenzy.) Avowals of literary ambitions and familial devotion, stories of death and faith, and a bold dramatic structure—based on flashbacks and leaps forward in time—set the vagaries of work and love on the firm footing of destiny.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*

Duck Butter
The hope of building a strong and lasting relationship on the basis of a sex game is the core of this emotionally intense but psychologically facile drama. Naima (Alia Shawkat), an aspiring actress in Los Angeles, meets and makes out with a singer-songwriter named Sergio (Laia Costa) at a bar, but deflects her suggestion that they spend an entire day together and give each other an orgasm per hour. Then Naima is fired from a movie that could have been her big break; needing consolation, distraction, and oblivion, she knocks on Sergio's door and takes her up on the offer. Much of the movie is a chamber drama for the two women, split between Sergio's rumpled house and Naima's pin-neat one, and the action is divided between semi-explicit but merely illustrative sex scenes and long stretches of dialogue that extract huge emotional shifts from tossed-off phrases and gestures. The exaggerated, unambiguous expressivity and the connect-the-dots definitions of character (featuring pat confessions and reheated memories) reflect the closed-off academicism of acting workshops and screenplay pitches rather than the open-ended complexities of life. The director, Miguel Arteta (who co-wrote the script with Shawkat), finds no symbolic dimension or wider resonance in the schematic proceedings.—*R.B. (In limited release and streaming.)*

I Feel Pretty
Amy Schumer works hard to infuse this comedy, built around dated self-help clichés, with a bit of vitality. She stars as Renee Bennett, a frustrated employee of a high-end New York cosmetics company who's relegated to its grim basement annex in Chinatown. She's unhappy with her face, her body, and her life; seeking change in a spin class, she falls off a bike, bumps her head, and awakens with boundless confidence in her beauty and her abilities. Suddenly frank and assertive, she chats up a shy young man (Rory Scovel), who becomes her boyfriend; talks herself into a job at the company's glamorous midtown headquarters; and is soon propelled into a prominent position representing the firm's new low-priced line. She also becomes an arrogant jerk who alienates her best friends (Aidy Bryant and Busy Philipps) and is tempted to sleep with one of the company's heirs (Tom Hopper). As written and directed by Abby Kohn and Marc Silverstein, Renee and her friends remain featureless ciphers, though Schumer delivers several moments of antic inspiration (including a wild dance scene that, unfortunately, is filmed clumsily).—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

Let the Sunshine In
The new movie from Claire Denis stars Juliette Binoche as Isabelle, who seems destined to be unlucky in love. She is an artist by trade, although only once do we see her at work, feverishly engaged in a bout of Action painting. She starts the film by having sex with a banker (Xavier Beauvois), and ends it by consulting a fortune-teller (Gérard Depardieu). In between, there is dancing, dining, a brief trip to the country (the rest of the tale is incorrigibly Parisian), and a string of disappointments and demurrals. Denis's approach is cunningly attuned to this uncertain mood; more than once, characters simply appear, unidentified and unannounced, as if wandering onto a stage, while others, like the heroine's daughter, are confined to the wings. Binoche, meanwhile, turns Isabelle into a mutable mixture of the forthright, the tearfully plaintive, and—all too rarely—the blissed-out. The film is loosely based on "A Lover's Discourse," by Roland Barthes, and, as such, provides an uneasy guide to the shifting sands of the romantic life. With Nicolas Duvauchelle, as a vain and drunken actor. In French.—*A.L. (5/7/18) (In limited release.)*

Mrs. Hyde
Serge Bozon's sharply political comedy—a giddily imaginative reworking of Robert Louis Stevenson's classic tale—stars Isabelle Huppert, who revels in its sly blend of dissonant humor, intellectual fervor, and macabre violence. She plays a double role, starting out as Marie Géquil (pronounced like "Jekyll"), a stiffly ineffective science teacher in a nondescript working-class high school filled with students of African and Middle Eastern descent. Then, zapped by one of her own experimental devices, Marie becomes Mrs. Hyde, a suddenly energetic and effective educator who awakens her students—especially one boy, the formerly disruptive Malik (Adda Senani)—to the beauties of science. Yet her newfound ardor for bold classroom initiatives is matched by literal fires that course through her body and eventually burst out, to catastrophic effect. Bozon, working with a script that he co-wrote with Axelle Ropert, confronts and overturns stereotypes of France's white and nonwhite populations alike, and most fiercely mocks the bureaucratic bombast of by-the-book functionaries. As in Stevenson's story, the unleashing of Marie's latent furies inevitably veers toward horror, infusing Bozon's sociological satire with bitter ironies about the forces of order and the uses of disorder. In French.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*

A Quiet Place
Behind John Krasinski's film lies a pleasingly plain idea. The world has been ravaged by sightless monsters, whose enormous ears allow them to pick up the faintest noise—human speech, say—and attack its source. Thus it is that Lee Abbott



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(Krasinski), his wife, Evelyn (Emily Blunt), and their children, Regan (Millicent Simmonds) and Marcus (Noah Jupe), pursue their lives, as best they can, amid the sounds of silence. In an isolated farmhouse, they walk barefoot along soft paths and communicate in sign language. (Simmonds, a determined presence onscreen, is deaf; you can feel the other actors taking their cues from her.) Dialogue is sparse, although Lee and his son can talk if drowned out by a thundering waterfall. The movie is curt and crisp, easily skirting the gaps in its plot, and the set pieces are laid out at careful intervals; one sequence, packed with fear and resourcefulness, is set in a corn silo. Krasinski has not really made a horror film; rather, he has taken the warmest of American themes—the solace of family and home—and chilled it with suspense.—*A.L. (4/16/18) (In wide release.)*

Red Line 7000
Starting in the nineteen-twenties, Howard Hawks filmed love and death among tough men in dangerous professions and the well-travelled women drawn to them. But in this movie, from 1965, the rapidly changing times disturbed his long-established habits. The story, about the romantic wranglings of stock-car racers on the Southern circuit, is mainly a string of erotic confrontations that mask vulnerability with pugnacious banter. The young James Caan, in his first leading role, brings something new to the Hawksian universe: a compressed, combustible neurosis, embedded in a Method-juiced bundle of tics and involutions. The brassy Hollywood stabs at rock music, the fashions caught between 007 and bluejeans, and the casual manners of the Pepsi Generation only heighten the contrast between Hawks's typical brisk suaveness and the air of shambling confessionalism, with its implications of therapy and regression. The supercharged sexual ambiguities reach their apex in a stunning morning-after scene, filmed in a tense three-minute take, between a deflowered virgin (Laura Devon) and a swaggering rural stud (John Robert Crawford); it's one of the greatest bedroom moments in cinema.—*R.B. (Museum of the Moving Image, May 13.)*

Zama
The bureaucratic and intimate frustrations of a Spanish magistrate in a remote Argentinean outpost in the eighteenth century furnish the director Lucrecia Martel's new film with rarefied passions and inspire a highly original style to match. The middle-aged official, Diego de Zama (Daniel Giménez Cacho), is posted far from his wife and children, and his relentless requests for a transfer are mocked and ignored by local governors. One young subordinate openly defies him; another, a writer, troubles his conscience. He hears from Spanish settlers who've murdered the indigenous population and now lack slaves; an aristocratic woman seeks his help and toys with his affections. With a dreamlike obliviousness, Zama observes and colludes in the brutal injustices on which the colonial regime runs. Then, in despair, he volunteers for a dangerous mission in pursuit of bandits. Adapting a novel by Antonio Di Benedetto, Martel creates a cinema of dialectical tensions; the bustling activity of offices and drawing rooms veers outside the frame while voices of authority and complaint assail the hero with a bewildering tangle of conflicting demands and desires. The dramatic fusion of physical and administrative power captures nothing less than the bloody forging of modernity. In Spanish.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*

CLASSICAL MUSIC



In 1916, the composer Ethel Smyth wrote that England was "conservative to the verge of imbecility."

Metaphysical Music

A composer finally gets her due.

The British composer Ethel Smyth's music is often vigorous and dramatic; it can also sometimes be ponderous, even in moments of inspiration. Mostly, it's unheard, largely because in Smyth's day, as she herself observed, "a critic's first and last thought in connection with a woman's work"—whatever virtues it possessed—was "her sex." Though Smyth achieved some fame during her lifetime (her opera "Der Wald" was performed at the Met in 1903, more than a century before another woman received the same recognition), she was often relegated to the status of a novelty: a lady composer, a lesbian, a suffragette. Since her death, in 1944, her music has languished in obscurity. So she would surely be pleased to know that her last major work, "The Prison," will be performed on May 11 at Carnegie Hall, by the Cecilia Chorus of New York.

For "The Prison," Smyth adapted a metaphysical text by her friend Harry Brewster, in which a condemned man communes with his own soul. In tones that oscillate between solemnity and fierce ecstasy, the baritone Prisoner and his soprano interlocutor (sung here by the able soloists Tobias Greenhalgh and Chelsea Shephard) discuss, along with the chorus, the inextinguishable nature of human passions. The piece, which draws on British and Continental traditions—Smyth was a committed cosmopolitan—is hard to categorize: Smyth called it a "symphony," but it's closer to a tone poem, with elements of cantata and oratorio. Mark Shapiro, the Cecilia's director, presented a piano reduction of the work two years ago, but the orchestrated version, demonstrating the full breadth of Smyth's talent, is only now receiving its American début.

By the time Smyth completed "The Prison," in 1930, she was almost deaf. Undaunted, she conducted the first performance herself, at the age of seventy-two. Her composer's note describes "The Prison" as "a record of a struggle to escape from the bonds of self," and though Smyth wished to be viewed as an artist among artists, she knew that she faced an uphill battle: England, she wrote in 1916, was "conservative to the verge of imbecility." A century later, a concert of Smyth's work is an avowedly revisionist statement. By challenging the white-male canon of classical music, it issues a call to her successors. As "The Prison" has it, "We are full of immortality."

—*Fergus McIntosh*

ILLUSTRATION BY ANTOINE MAILLARD



OPERA

Metropolitan Opera
Bartlett Sher's production of Gounod's **"Roméo et Juliette"** doesn't exactly lend Shakespeare's great love story new impact, but it brings a satisfying simulacrum of Verona to life. Ailyn Pérez and Charles Castronovo play the lovers; Plácido Domingo conducts. *May 9 at 7:30 and May 12 at 1.* • A revival of Mary Zimmerman's staging of Donizetti's **"Lucia di Lammermoor"** features Pretty Yende and Michael Fabiano as the opera's volatile lovers; Roberto Abbado. *May 10 at 7:30.* • Laurent Pelly's storybook production of Massenet's **"Cendrillon"** features a trio of topnotch mezzo-sopranos: Stephanie Blythe, Alice Coote, and, in the lead, Joyce DiDonato; Bertrand de Billy. *May 11 at 8.* • Anna Netrebko sings the title role of Puccini's **"Tosca,"** an alluring, larger-than-life diva who delivers one of the most beloved arias in the Italian repertoire. Najmiddin Mavlyanov and the volcanic Michael Volle vie for her affection in David McVicar's handsome production; de Billy. *May 12 at 8. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000. These are the final performances of the season.)*

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic
Fresh from a week of violin performances with the orchestra, the versatile Nikolaj Znaider ascends the podium to conduct works written by composers at either end of their careers: Tchaikovsky's youthful Symphony No. 1, and Elgar's late, elegiac Cello Concerto. *May 10 at 7:30 and May 11-12 at 8. (David Geffen Hall. 212-875-5656.)*

RECITALS

Benjamin Verdery with the St. Lawrence String Quartet
Verdery, a dynamic performer and the artistic director of the "Art of the Guitar" series at the 92nd Street Y, joins the charismatic St. Lawrence players in a program that ranges from crowd-pleasers by Bach and Boccherini to a world première composed by Bryce Dessner, best known as a guitarist in the rock band the National. *May 10 at 7:30. (212-415-5500.)*

Emanuel Ax
This characterful piano virtuoso has assembled a Carnegie Hall program that favors the Austrian and German traditions, playing music by Mozart and Bach. (Liszt also features.) Beethoven's famed "Waldstein" sonata, a cheery and elaborate work from his middle period, caps the evening, and is preceded by the composer's "Andante Favori," a lovely interlude originally written as part of the piece. *May 10 at 8. (212-247-7800.)*

Julia Wolfe: "Spinning"
Wolfe, a co-founder of the composers' collective Bang on a Can and the winner of the 2015 Pulitzer Prize for music, collaborates with the flamboyantly theatrical cellist Maya Beiser and the multimedia designer Laurie Olinder in the world première of a piece inspired by the craft of spinning thread—a laborious practice traditionally associated with both women and music. Presented by Peak Performances, the seventy-five-minute work also features the cellists Melody Giron and Lavena Johanson. *May 10-11 at 7:30, May 12 at 8, and May 13 at 3. (Alexander Kasser Theatre, 1 Normal Ave., Montclair, N.J. peakperfs.org.)*

Chiara Quartet
After eighteen years together, this excellent Nebraska-based string quartet marks the end of its partnership—its members plan to focus on solo work—with a concert at the Metropolitan Museum. These inveterate champions of contemporary music are joined by the pianist Paul Barnes and the Axion Estin Chanters for a new piece by Philip Glass, based on a Greek Orthodox hymn. Alone, the quartet bookends the program with works by Beethoven and the American composer Nico Muhly. *May 12 at 2. (Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium. metmuseum.org.)*

Sol Gabetta
The Argentine cellist brings her glistening tone to Alice Tully Hall, where she appears alongside her frequent collaborator, the French pianist Bertrand Chamayou. Together, they play touchstones of the repertoire, including Chopin's Sonata in G Minor, Op. 65, and the savage, experimental Sonata for Cello and Piano, also Op. 65, which Britten wrote for Mstislav Rostropovich. *May 12 at 7:30. (212-721-6500.)*

Vanessa Rossetto
Rossetto, an imaginative composer of dense, rough-hewn electronic works pitched perfectly between ambiguity and allusion, presents the première of "The Dirt," a meditation on trauma and memory based on her mother's recollections of the London Blitz, accompanied by a film by Matthew Revert. The sound artist C. Lavender opens with "Transmutation Helix," exploring links between aural experience and health. *May 12 at 8. (Issue Project Room, 22 Boerum Pl., Brooklyn. issueprojectroom.org.)*

Christina and Michelle Naughton
These identical-twin pianists premièred John Adams's "Roll Over Beethoven," a densely referential take on themes by the German composer, in New York in 2016. Here, they bring it back to the city, in a program that also includes duets by Ravel, Chopin, and Lutosławski. *May 13 at 11 A.M. (Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500.)*

Bang on a Can Marathon
If nothing in particular leaps out and proclaims itself the must-see element of this ten-hour-long new-music celebration, that just serves to underscore how thoroughly the founders of Bang on a Can—the composers Michael Gordon, David Lang, and Julia Wolfe—have conditioned us: we now expect and embrace a world in which such artists as Terry Riley, Stephin Merritt, Mazz Swift, Sō Percussion, Maya Beiser, and the Bang on a Can All-Stars can share both a stage and an eager audience. Admission is free, but reservations are advised. *May 13 at noon. (N.Y.U. Skirball Center, 566 LaGuardia Pl. nyuskirball.org.)*

The Stone: John King
A versatile composer and instrumentalist who is indelibly linked to downtown ingenuity thanks to associations with the Kitchen and the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, King demonstrates his range in four concerts presented as part of John Zorn's innovative series, which recently moved to the New School. King opens in a beguiling collaboration with the Secret Quartet, presenting new works for oud and strings. Thereafter, he offers live electronics with David Behrman; an evening of varied duos; and a closing program of micro-operas, featuring the remarkable vocalists Joan La Barbara and Gelsey Bell. *May 15-18 at 8:30. (Glass Box Theatre, 55 W. 13th St. thestonenyc.com.)*

DANCE

New York City Ballet
The Jerome Robbins festival, "Robbins 100," continues. This is a rare opportunity to see the company perform "In the Night," a ballet about three contrasting couples set to Chopin nocturnes. Even more rarely performed is the quiet "Antique Epigraphs," a chamber work for eight women inspired by Roman figures from the Villa of the Papyri, in Herculaneum. Rarest of all is "Les Noces," Robbins's take on Stravinsky's 1923 cantata—for four pianos, percussion, and chorus—depicting the stark rituals of an imagined Russian folk wedding. (No cake, lots of jumping.) • May 9 at 7:30 and May 12 at 8: "The Goldberg Variations" and "Les Noces." • May 10 at 7:30, May 12 at 2, and May 13 at 3: "The Four Seasons," "Circus Polka," "A Suite of Dances," "Easy," and "Something to Dance About." • May 11 at 8: "Interplay," "In the Night," "The Cage," "Other Dances," and "Fanfare." • May 15 at 7:30: "In G Major," "Afternoon of a Faun," "Antique Epigraphs," and "The Concert." *(David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Through June 3.)*

American Ballet Theatre
The balletomanes' feast begins this week, when both New York companies perform concurrently at Lincoln Center. While New York City Ballet's focus is on one-act dances, A.B.T.'s spring season is devoted to big, well-worn, evening-length story ballets like "Swan Lake" and "Don Quixote," each of which runs for a week. There are two new works, one by the Briton Wayne McGregor and the other by the house choreographer Alexei Ratmansky. In "Afterite," McGregor—known for his stretchy, hyper-driven style of movement—takes inspiration from Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring." "Harlequinade," in contrast, is Ratmansky's setting of Petipa's 1900 piece "Les Millions d'Arlequin," carefully reconstructed from period notations and images. The company kicks things off with "Giselle," fielding no fewer than seven casts, the most starry of which—featuring the exciting Russian ballerina Natalia Osipova and the American paragon of classicism David Hallberg—appears on May 18. • May 14 at 7:30: "Giselle." *(Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center. 212-477-3030. Through July 7.)*

Limón Dance Company
José Limón, one of the giants of the American modern-dance movement, died in 1972, but the company has persisted, through thick and thin, in the decades since. In 2016, it took on a new director, Colin Connor, who is also a choreographer. Connor has produced a new work for the season, "The Body Is a House Without Walls," set to Beethoven. The rest of the repertory, distributed in three discrete programs, includes the Limón classic "Missa Brevis" (1958), a paean to the human spirit lifting itself up from the ruins of war, created after a visit to Poland, which was still scarred by the destruction of the Second World War. *(Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. May 8-13.)*

"Elvis Everywhere"
The choreographer Mark Dendy is a keen, funny, and cutting observer of the grotesqueries of American life, and life in general. In "Elvis Everywhere," he and his collaborator Stephen Donovan (together they are Dendy/Donovan) take on the entire myth of America, as represented by Elvis Presley. Various performers embody the legend at different points in his career, including a strange encounter between the King and Donald Rumsfeld, backstage at a Las Vegas casino in the seventies, just after the end of the Vietnam War. The work was commissioned by the American Dance Festival, in Durham, N.C., and is part of the festival's run at New York Live Arts. *(219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. May 10-12.)*

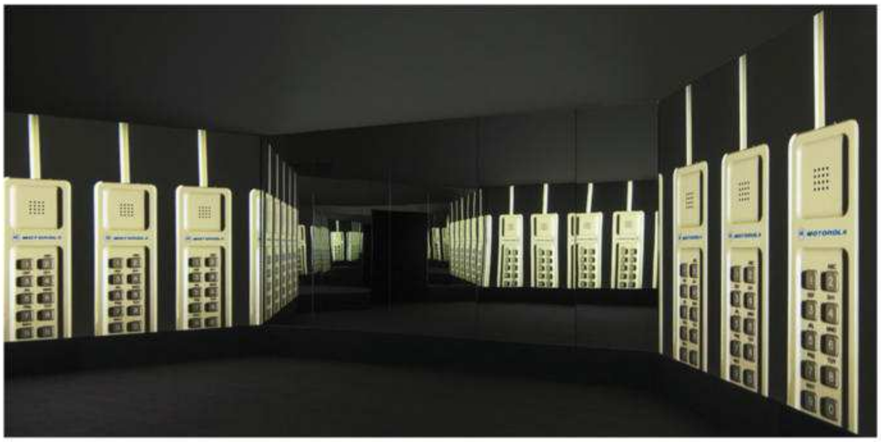
"Soaking WET"
The ever-exquisite Vicky Shick returns to the Upper West Side dance series with "Wash / A Variety Show." Characteristically, it's a collection of miniatures, poetic and detailed and mildly eccentric; the cast includes such reliably fascinating performers as Meg Harper, Omagbitse Omagbemi, and Marilyn Maywald Yahel. An alternate program features new work by the choreographers Rebecca Lazier, Garnet Henderson, and Joya Powell. *(West End Theatre, 263 W. 86th St. 866-811-4111. May 10-13.)*

La MaMa Moves! Dance Festival
This year's events open with a revival of "Les Choses Dernières," a 1994 solo by the veteran Canadian choreographer Lucie Grégoire. A response to the dystopian novel "In the Country of Last Things," by Paul Auster (who joins Grégoire for a post-show discussion on May 10), it's an elegant hour-long ordeal of wandering, vulnerability, and resilience, now danced by Kim Henry. Also in the starting lineup is "To Catch a Terrorist," by the Adham Hafez Company/HaRaKa. An entrepreneur of Egyptian avant-garde theatre, Hafez is an intellectual magpie whose text-heavy works bristle with political ideas. This one draws on visa applications, transcripts of court hearings, and data analysis to examine Muslim stereotypes and the large-scale choreography executed by governments. *(Ellen Stewart, 66 E. 4th St. 646-430-5374. May 10-13. Through June 3.)*

Eiko Otake
It was a big deal, a few years back, when the married Japanese-born duo Eiko and Koma, celebrated for decades as the King and Queen of Slow, started performing without each other. For this "Fridays at Noon" event, Eiko dances a solo. Then she chats about the couple's history, including the recent shift to solo work, with Rosemary Candelario, the author of "Flowers Cracking Concrete," a 2016 study of the pair. *(92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. May 11.)*

Flamenco Vivo Carlota Santana
To create the centerpiece of its thirty-fifth-anniversary season, this stalwart local troupe has hired Belén Maya, a long-established innovator with a Gypsy pedigree. Her new piece "Mujeres Valientes" celebrates defiant Latin-American women—in particular, the seventeenth-century poet-philosopher Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and the nineteenth-century revolutionary Manuela Sáenz. Also on the program are two younger Spaniards: the hunky, virtuosic José Maldonado and the passionate Guadalupe Torres. A five-member band accompanies. *(BAM Fisher, 321 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. May 15. Through May 20.)*

ART



A video still from Doug Aitken's kaleidoscopic installation "New Era," at the 303 Gallery.

Cellular Level

The video artist Doug Aitken mirrors our obsession with mobile technology.

Forty-five years ago, the American engineer Martin Cooper stood on a sidewalk in midtown Manhattan and changed the world: he made the first public call on a cell phone. Today, according to a U.N. study, more people own mobile phones than they do toilets. For the mesmerizing video installation "New Era" (on view at the 303 Gallery through May 25), the artist Doug Aitken filmed Cooper, who is now eighty-nine, reminiscing and mulling over what his invention has wrought. When he says, "You can have everybody in the universe being one with everyone else, just one entity that is all-powerful," it's unclear whether that's a pro or a con. He doesn't discuss planned obsolescence, but he does reflect on mortality: "You start recognizing your limitations at some point, and it's just not going to stop."

With "New Era," Aitken finds a sweet spot between rumination and spectacle, while steering clear of the showmanship that has left some of his recent projects feeling a little too slick. (Examples include geodesic sculptures submerged off the California coast and a cross-country "nomadic happening," produced from a train.) Here, he has constructed a mirrored, hexagonal space inside the gallery, in which three projections from the same eleven-minute loop alternate with reflections. The moving images aren't in synch, and the effect is disorienting, with viewers restlessly shifting position to take it all in. The result is a crowd of people glued to the screens, at once hypnotized and acting out the A.D.H.D. of the digital age.

Footage of Cooper in a black-box studio, facing the sea (a live-action Romantic hero out of Caspar David Friedrich), and walking through a water-splashed cavern is intercut with sweeping aerial views of urban arteries and remote landscapes, some of them revealing the curving edge of the planet, perhaps satellite shots from outer space. Best of all are the sequences of an old-school Motorola phone, kaleidoscopically multiplying and set to a soundtrack that builds from portentously repetitive, à la Steve Reich, to full-throttle techno. It's like a Busby Berkeley routine for Generation Coachella.

"New Era" acknowledges the image overload that has become the new normal, but it doesn't condemn wired lives. Aitken's message may simply be: proceed with caution. As Cooper repeatedly says, in his sonorous voice, "I made a phone call," it's as if he is letting us know that he invented the wheel, but he also discovered fire.

—*Andrea K. Scott*

Metropolitan Museum
"Painted in Mexico, 1700-1790: Pinxit Mexici"
There are more than a hundred paintings in this astounding exhibition, many of them recently restored. Produced by Mexican-born artists following the colonial influx of Spanish painters, who came to decorate newly built churches, these innovative works express both their creators' attunement to transatlantic developments and their pride in their native heritage. Some compositions are emblazoned with the words *pinxit Mexici* ("painted in Mexico"), but differences of style, iconography, and subject matter are sufficient to distinguish them from their European counterparts. The life-size "Ascension of Christ," painted in 1720 by Juan Rodríguez Juárez, exemplifies his influential approach; with a soft palette and striking intimacy, it depicts an awed crowd reaching out to touch low-flying angels. One fascinating section is devoted to the *casta* genre—scenes of racially mixed families—illuminating the complex social structures and dress codes of the post-conquest era. Amid the sombre portraits and the crucifixion scenes, there are many delirious pleasures. A sumptuous case in point is Miguel Cabrera's "The Divine Spouse," made circa 1850, which stars Christ as a sloe-eyed dreamboat reclining on a bed of flowers, as a sorority of love-drunk angels look on. *Through July 22.*

MOMA PS1
"Fernando Palma Rodríguez: In Ixtli in Yollotl, We the People"
If you're a fan of "Westworld," check out this show of sculptural robots—violent delights with a pacifist message. Palma Rodríguez, a sixty-year-old indigenous Mexican artist, engineer, and activist, makes an impressive U.S. museum début with this compact two-decade survey. The show entertains, but it's also a slow burn, balancing chimerical imagination with political indignation and concern for the natural world. Renditions of restless deities, insects, and animals, which combine software, electronic components, and salvaged materials, appear purposefully humble, with dangling wires, exposed circuits, and notations on scraps of tape. High-tech but lo-fi, they suggest the results of an especially fruitful dumpster dive. The pair of quivering butterflies in "Papalutzin" are cut from colorful aluminum cans, with the Pepsi logo visible on one blue wing—a monarch reincarnated from industrial waste. "Nanahuatzin," named for the Aztec sun god, involves an old sewing machine, a leather glove, and the red-and-yellow mask of the *lucha libre* wrestler Solar. Activated, like most of the works here, by a motion sensor, its rapid-fire movements unnerve. The artist calibrates his machines to act unpredictably, as if to signal a world out of balance—bodies detached from their souls and in thrall to technologies, trapped in an endless cycle of upgrade and discard. But, for all its intimations of chaos, "In Ixtli in Yollotl" has a dark optimism. Like few artists can (Bruce Nauman comes to mind), Palma Rodríguez tempers frustration with empathy. *Through Sept. 10.*

Whitney Museum of American Art
"Nick Mauss: Transmissions"
Mauss refreshes the artist-as-curator tradition in his first solo museum show in the U.S., an engrossing constellation of art and archival materials relating to the overlapping, cross-pollinating worlds of modernist ballet and the avant-garde in New York, in the nineteen-thirties and beyond. Viewers

first walk down a corridor lined with photographs notable for their pop-Surrealist glamour and homoerotic celebration of the male figure. Taken by George Platt Lynes, who became the official photographer of the New York City Ballet in 1934, these (unofficial) portraits of dancers, frequently en déshabillé, were preserved by the sexologist Alfred Kinsey. The suite is a fitting prelude to the exhibition's illumination of alternative, queer artistic lineages. The diverse works on view include such treasures as Mauss's re-creation of a transparent gas-pump-attendant costume, designed by Paul Cadmus for the 1937 ballet "Filling Station"; winsome figures by the Polish-born modernist sculptor Elie Nadelman; a three-fold screen adorned with melodramatic watercolors by the set designer Eugène Berman; and a show-stopping, large-scale slide show of color photographs by the dance critic Carl Van Vechten, who for decades captured the personalities of his milieu with rapturous flamboyance. Daily performances in the gallery, choreographed in collaboration with sixteen dancers, complement Mauss's inspired installation. *Through May 14.*

Morgan Library and Museum
"Peter Hujar: Speed of Life"
Hujar, who died of AIDS-related pneumonia in 1987, at the age of fifty-three, was among the greatest of all American photographers and has had, by far, the most confusing reputation. This dazzling retrospective of a hundred and sixty-four pictures, curated by Joel Smith, affirms Hujar's excellence while, if anything, complicating his history. The works range across the genres of portraiture, nudes, cityscape, and still-life—the stillest of all from the catacombs of Palermo, Italy, shot in 1963. The finest are portraits, not only of people but of cows, sheep, and, most notably, an individual goose, with an eagerly confiding mien. The quality of Hujar's prints, tending to sumptuous blacks and simmering grays, transfixes. He was a darkroom master, maintaining technical standards for which he got scant credit except among certain cognoscenti. He never hatched a signature look to rival those of more celebrated elders who influenced him (Richard Avedon, Diane Arbus) or those of younger peers who learned from him (Robert Mapplethorpe, Nan Goldin). His pictures share, in place of a style, an unfailing rigor that can only be experienced, not described. *Through May 20.*

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Ginny Casey
Imagine a short story by Franz Kafka, illustrated by Gahan Wilson in collaboration with Milton Avery, and you get a sense of this young painter's work. Shadowy blue-green interiors assume claustrophobic dimensions in big square paintings, in which a lime-green easy chair shares the frame with an oversized metronome and a wooden door meets disproportionately large keys. In the show's standout painting, two beautifully rendered blue hands extend from the cuffs of an unbuttoned shirt, which is draped over the back of a suspiciously corporeal chair. *Through May 9. (Half Gallery, 43 E. 78th St. 212-744-0151.)*

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Harmony Hammond
For five decades, this outspoken lesbian artist has been undercutting the pretense that minimalism is somehow pure or free of reference by packing her densely textured works with associations. In "Small Erasure #3," from 1999, a sternly worded letter to Hammond from an attorney—regarding the return of another artist's slides—provides the delicate background for a rust-colored diptych, in which dark drips redact portions of the text. "Inappropriate Longings," a mysterious, poetic installation from 1992, hints at a painful story: behind a metal trough of dry leaves hangs a panoramic three-panel painting, composed of cracked floral-print linoleum and earth-tone paint. The words "goddamn dyke" float, half erased, on a field of gold brushstrokes. *Through May 27. (Gray, 508 W. 26th St. 212-399-2636.)*

Judy Linn
The New York photographer's installation feels casual, with pictures printed in a range of sizes and pinned to the walls, but the images are unified by an exacting vision. The geometry of a pickup truck, softened by shadows, is echoed by the diagonals that dominate a scene of a big-box-store exterior, its blue-and-gold logo matching a triangle of afternoon sky and parking-lot curb. Call the approach "found abstraction." As the sculptor Arlene Shechet, the show's astute and admiring curator, writes in an accompanying essay, a Linn photograph "does the same thing for me as a majestic Ellsworth Kelly painting." *Through May 19. (CUE Art Foundation, 137 W. 25th St. 212-206-3583.)*

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Keith Sonnier
The post-minimalist sculptor is best known for his work in neon, which we think of as light, but which is also a gas. This exhibition, which reprises Sonnier's M.F.A. thesis at Rutgers, in 1966, finds him experimenting with air in a series of soft sculptures, made of canvas, satin, and cheesecloth, which inflate and deflate with a rhythm that feels more organic than mechanical. The sharp-witted gallerist Eneas Capalbo reinforces these vintage works with a selection of the artist's drawings. A light-and-sound piece by the polymathic Peter Coffin, in the back room, is an ideal companion. *Through May 20. (The National Exemplar, 59 Franklin St. thenationalexemplargallery.com.)*

Jenna Westra
This promising young photographer's pictures feel at once stagey and sincere. In one black-and-white image, a woman kneels on an open copy of a photography encyclopedia, her feet bare and her head cropped out of the frame—a coy acknowledgment of art history's tendency to objectify female bodies. Similarly cropped shots of figures—holding out a sliced cantaloupe and posing, openmouthed, under a hand squeezing a lemon—tantalizingly evoke advertising. But a video documenting the models working with Westra lacks the ambiguous tension of its still counterparts. *Through May 13. (Lubov, 373 Broadway, at Franklin St. 347-496-5833.)*

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

The Beast in the Jungle
John Kander and David Thompson wrote this dance-theatre piece, directed and choreographed by Susan Stroman and inspired by Henry James's 1903 novella, about a man convinced he has a terrible destiny. *(Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303. In previews.)*

The Boys in the Band
Joe Mantello directs a fiftieth-anniversary revival of the seminal gay drama by Mart Crowley, starring Jim Parsons, Zachary Quinto, Matt Bomer, and Andrew Rannells. *(Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)*

Dan Cody's Yacht
In Anthony Giardina's play, directed by Doug Hughes for Manhattan Theatre Club, a Boston schoolteacher gets an unexpected financial proposal from a student's father. *(City Center Stage I, at 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Previews begin May 15.)*

Long Day's Journey Into Night
Sir Richard Eyre directs the Bristol Old Vic production of the Eugene O'Neill drama, featuring Jeremy Irons and Lesley Manville ("Phantom Thread"). *(BAM Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. In previews. Opens May 12.)*

Me and My Girl
Encores! presents the 1937 musical, revamped in 1984, about a Cockney man (Christian Borle) who unexpectedly becomes the Earl of Hareford. *(City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. May 9-13.)*

Paradise Blue
Ruben Santiago-Hudson directs Dominique Morisseau's play, about a jazz trumpeter in Detroit's gentrifying Black Bottom neighborhood in 1949. *(Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529. In previews. Opens May 14.)*

Twelfth Night
The Acting Company stages Maria Aitken's production of the comedy, a collaboration with Delaware's Resident Ensemble Players. *(Polonsky Shakespeare Center, 262 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 866-811-4111. Previews begin May 10. Opens May 13.)*

NOW PLAYING

A Brief History of Women
A smooth comedy that leaves a lump in the throat, Alan Ayckbourn's occasionally sentimental play (at "Brits Off Broadway") visits an English manor house at twenty-year intervals. First, the house is a private home, then it's a private school, then a tumbledown arts center, then a boutique hotel. The same man, Antony Spates, pops up in each incarnation, in thrall to various women. Antony Eden plays Spates, while five other actors reappear as different characters, like a sitcom version of Nietzsche's eternal

return. If Ayckbourn's direction is sometimes too broad—lots of people shrieking, mouths agape—the structure is pleasingly narrow, allowing the playwright his usual games with space and time. Though each scene's arc is as predictable as an arrow heading toward a bull's-eye, Ayckbourn's gnarly take on the triumphs and disasters of the heart humanizes every vignette. *(59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)*

Harry Potter and the Cursed Child, Parts One and Two
Nineteen years after the Battle of Hogwarts, Harry Potter (Jamie Parker)—the Dad Who Lived—is a desk jockey at the Ministry of Magic and a bedevilled father of three. Most troublesome is his middle son, Albus (Sam Clemmett), made angry by the burden of his famous father and by his own lack of obvious talents. He connects with another scion and outcast, Scorpius Malfoy (Anthony Boyle), and misguided plans are soon hatched. The play, from a story by J. K. Rowling, John Tiffany (who directs), and Jack Thorne (who wrote the script), is a two-part, five-hour affair. For fans, it will pass in an anxious instant. What if the events in the Harry Potter books had turned out differently? That's the inspired device that sends the plot whirling. There are plenty of in-jokes, poignant cameos, and sentimental speeches about the gulf between parents and children, plus one awesome jump scare. But what will linger in the mind are the ingenious physical realizations of magic and the feeling of being cocooned in the all-encompassing goodness of Rowling's world. *(Lyric, 214 W. 43rd St. 877-250-2929.)*

Henry V
The Public's Mobile Unit brings pared-down, usually abridged Shakespeare plays to unconventional spaces before a short run on the home turf. The director Robert O'Hara (also the author of such plays as "Bootycandy" and "Barbecue") makes the most of a cast of nine and a tiny stage area; his most bracing idea is to cast a young African-American woman, Zenzi Williams, as the titular king. The warring French and English factions are identified by blue and red accessories, and the action moves at a fast clip. But you win some, you lose a lot more. While the Mobile Unit's shows are meant to be accessible to wide audiences, this one is overly cartoonish. The French, for instance, are played with ridiculous accents and broad gesturing that recall not Shakespeare so much as another British institution: Monty Python. *(Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Through May 13.)*

The Iceman Cometh
Although there are many performers in George C. Wolfe's staging of Eugene O'Neill's phenomenal 1946 four-act and nearly four-hour drama, there is only one actor, and his name is Austin Butler. As Don Parritt, an eighteen-year-old boy who takes up residence at Harry Hope's dive bar and hotel on Manhattan's Lower West Side, Butler quietly conveys what many of his castmates try to show by shouting and grandstanding: his character's inner life. It's the summer of 1912, and the barflies share a belief in the redemptive quality of fantasy—it keeps you from yourself, whoever that may be. Hickey (Denzel Washington), a travelling salesman, wants the men to face the truth. In his stage work, Washington has sometimes risked letting unpleasantness show, but Hickey requires something both more and less than that—a searching, lost quality masquerading as a certainty that he himself can't define. What Washington lacks—and it's essential—is a sense of Hickey's madness. (Reviewed in our issue of 5/7/18.) *(Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)*

Mean Girls
The witty and withering teen comedy is now a fetch Broadway musical, with an updated script by Tina Fey—this time, the mean girls post mean GIFs—and music by her husband, Jeff Richmond. (The lyrics are by Nell Benjamin.) Erika Henningsen plays Cady, a homeschooled math whiz who relocates from Africa to Illinois, where she must navigate the wilds of an American high school. At first, she falls in with the "art freaks," who persuade her to infiltrate the Plastics: a cabal of popular girls ruled by the glossy tyrant Regina George (the fearsome Taylor Louderman). Fey's 2004 screenplay is so taut and quotable that the addition of songs seems almost gratuitous, and Richmond's music has the interchangeable pop-anthem sound that's become standard on Broadway. But who needs Tina Fey to reinvent musical comedy? She does just fine with the help of the ace director and choreographer Casey Nicholaw ("The Book of Mormon"). *(August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 877-250-2929.)*



Lesley Manville and Jeremy Irons star in Eugene O'Neill's addled family drama "Long Day's Journey Into Night," at BAM Harvey Theatre, a three-week import from the Bristol Old Vic.

My Fair Lady
Lerner and Loewe's hit 1956 musical (in a Lincoln Center Theatre revival, directed by Bartlett Sher) examines the reality of one man's fantasy of remaking a woman in his own image. Part of the pleasure of watching this staging is observing not how Eliza Doolittle (Lauren Ambrose, who has a beautiful, if limited, soprano) becomes more herself as the show goes on but how she learns to express that self—strong, indomitable, softened by dreams and wishes—in the language of the class that helps her cross over. It can seem as though Harry Hadden-Paton is overplaying Henry Higgins's snottiness, until you remember meeting any number of people like him, who frighten you with their chill while they try to draw you in with their smarts. Ambrose's Eliza, on the other hand, hurts us in the best possible way, when we realize too late, just as she does, that her love for Higgins amounts to a confusion between the construction of speech and the true language of feeling. (4/30/18) *(Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)*

Travesties
A work of nonsense and sensibility, Tom Stoppard's postmodern 1974 comedy whizzes back to Broadway. A historical footnote writ large and long, the play orbits around Henry Carr (Tom Hollander), a minor consular official stationed in Zurich in 1917, who more or less crossed paths with Vladimir Lenin, Tristan Tzara, and a mid-"Ulysses" James Joyce. The play is as aggressively intertextual as a typhoon in a library; since Carr and Joyce met while rehearsing "The Importance of Being Earnest" and sparred over the cost of a costume, Stoppard appropriates Wildean farce as a template. Under Patrick Marber's direction for the Roundabout, the wordplay is incorrigible, the showing off indictable. The whole audience sighs in agreement when Carr says, "I'm finding this conversation extremely hard to follow." Still, Stoppard brandishes each argument and gag with such joy that the play is as winning as it is indecipherable. *(American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)*

ALSO NOTABLE

Angels in America Neil Simon. • **The Birds** St. Ann's Warehouse. *Through May 13*. • **Carousel** Imperial. • **Children of a Lesser God** Studio 54. • **Escape to Margaritaville** Marquis. • **Frozen** St. James. • **Harry Clarke** Minetta Lane Theatre. *Through May 13*. • **Lobby Hero** Helen Hayes. *Through May 13*. • **The Metromaniacs** The Duke on 42nd Street. • **Miss You Like Hell** Public. *Through May 13*. • **Mlima's Tale** Public. • **Saint Joan** Samuel J. Friedman. • **The Seafarer** Irish Repertory. • **Summer** Lunt-Fontanne. • **Three Tall Women** Golden. • **Transfers** Lucille Lortel.

ILLUSTRATION BY BEN KIRCHNER

ABOVE & BEYOND



ILLUSTRATION BY PABLO AMARGO

International Migratory Bird Day
This spring highlight for bird-lovers includes festivities on Rockaway Beach and at the Audubon Center in Prospect Park. This year marks the hundredth anniversary of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, but it also happens to be a moment when some of the statute's protections are under attack. Last November, Representative Liz Cheney, of Wyoming, proposed legislation—H.R. 4239, an amendment to the American Energy Act—that could make avian stopovers throughout the U.S. more dangerous by reducing the accountability of corporations if wildlife is killed as a result of hazards like transmission lines, oil-waste pits, or gas flares. On a day set aside to contemplate the vast array of winged species that pass through the city, it's also worth remembering that, in the current political climate, even the ecosystem's most basic processes can't be taken for granted. *(Rockaway Beach between Beach 117th and 118th Sts., Queens. Audubon Center at the Boathouse in Prospect Park, 110 East Dr., Brooklyn. May 12. nycgovparks.org.)*

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

The auction season reaches its peak, with blockbuster sales of Impressionist, modern, and contemporary art. **Christie's** has scheduled an additional headline-grabbing sale, of the collection of Peggy and David Rockefeller, a few days earlier (May 8-10). The banking scion, who died last year, at the venerable age of a hundred and one, and his late wife were serious collectors—there are significant works by Picasso, O'Keeffe, Monet, and Rivera. One of the top lots on May 8, Picasso's charmingly naïf 1905 "Fillette à la Corbeille Fleurie" ("Girl Holding a Flowering Basket"), once hung in Gertrude Stein's Paris home. A work by Malevich, "Suprematist Composition," painted the year before the Russian Revolution, is the highlight of the Impressionist and modern sale on May 15. The vivid canvas, composed of tilted squares and lines in bright blue, green, and yellow, was hidden away in Germany during the Second World War, then taken into the collection of the Stedelijk Museum, in Amsterdam, and recently returned to the heirs of Malevich's family, who now bring it to auction. *(20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)* • African and Oceanic art are often cited as major inspirations for European modernist painters and sculptors. **Sotheby's** is underscoring this artistic link by holding two sales of African, Oceanic, pre-Columbian, and American Indian art on the same day that it opens its Impressionist and modern sales (May 14). The first of the two auctions is devoted to a small group of sculptures from a private collection, including a striking fragment of an Olmec mask rendered in green stone, a Malian sculpture of a singing musician, and a painted Native American mask with bearlike features from the Pacific Northwest. This is followed by an evening sale of Impressionist and modern art, headlined by a lilac-hued, aqueous composition by Monet ("Matinée sur la Seine"), a serene painting by Picasso of his muse Marie-Thérèse Walter at rest ("Le Repos"), and the dramatic "Perro Aullando a la Luna" ("Dog Wailing at the Moon"), by the Mexican modernist Rufino Tamayo. *(York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)*

READINGS AND TALKS

Greenlight Bookstore
"The Mars Room," Rachel Kushner's new novel, splits its setting between a fictional prison and unchic areas of San Francisco and Los Angeles, where the book's central figure, Romy Hall, committed the crimes that have earned her two life sentences. Kushner talks about her sojourn into the world of correctional facilities with the National Book Award winner Jonathan Franzen. *(686 Fulton St., at S. Portland Ave., Brooklyn. 718-246-0200. May 9 at 7:30.)*

CUNY Graduate Center
"If I were an early person," the poet Anne Carson wrote recently, "I'd look for the limits of wisdom / by going to sacred oak trees / or the local blind man with lips on fire." The bravura conveyed in those lines may explain why she's been successful performing transformative work inspired by the literature of antiquity. In this evening's lecture, entitled "Envisioning the Classics," Carson discusses how writing from the distant past informs her vision of contemporaneity. *(Proshansky Auditorium, 365 Fifth Ave. gc.cuny.edu/publicprograms. May 10 at 6:30.)*

FOOD & DRINK



TABLES FOR TWO

Claro

284 Third Ave., Brooklyn (347-721-3126)

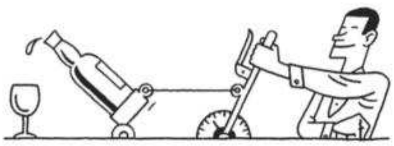
In English, the Spanish word *claro* translates literally to "clear," but, as the owners of Claro, a new Mexican restaurant in Gowanus, explain on their Web site, it's also used to mean "of course." It's what I would say if someone asked me if, when I went to Mexico City, I ate at the oft-Instagrammed seafood restaurant Contramar, and if I tried the famous tuna tostada: *¡Claro que sí!* Of course I did. And so I was delighted to find a similar dish at Claro: a tortilla toasted until golden and crunchy, adorned with gently mashed avocado, luscious pink cubes of raw yellowfin, juicy wedges of winter's last Cara Cara oranges, and shards of bubbly chicharrón.

One of these costs twenty-four dollars at Claro. It's not that the chef, T. J. Steele, a white American who splits his time between New York and Oaxaca, is gussying up traditional Mexican food with luxury touchstones. He, along with a host of other chefs in both the U.S. and Mexico, is simply challenging the idea that Mexican food should be inexpensive and informal, using high-quality ingredients to make everything from scratch, and paying rent in a recently gentrified neighborhood. And so heirloom corn is nixtamalized in-house daily, for tortilla-like Oaxacan *memelas*, which are slightly fatter and come loaded with wild mushrooms and epazote or chorizo and potatoes. Shreds of Steele's own *quesillo*, a Oaxacan string cheese, might top shrimp tacos or a salad of tender leek tops, red cabbage, carrot fronds, and pea shoots, tossed in an herby dressing made with ground *chapulines* (grasshoppers).

Oaxaca is known for its mole, an expansive category of incredibly complex chili-based sauces that often get reduced to "bitter chocolate" in the States, even though they don't necessarily contain cacao. Steele usually offers a few kinds: a sweet but balanced rust-colored *rojo*, blanketing pork cheek; a *negro* that cooks twice as long, served over grass-fed short rib; a smoky mole chocolate cake. But if there's one Oaxacan export he'll truly expand your understanding of, it's mezcal. At Claro, it's treated like wine—a knowledgeable bartender will walk you through tasting notes for the fifty or so varieties—and like whiskey, offered with a beer as a boilermaker and in cocktails. The *leche totochtin*, a savory milk punch for which the spirit is washed in duck fat, might sound exceedingly strange, but did you know that some mezcal is distilled with a raw chicken or turkey breast hanging over it? Now you do. And the next time someone tries to impress you with that fact, there will be only one response: *Claro. (Dishes $13-$32.)*

—Hannah Goldfield

BAR TAB



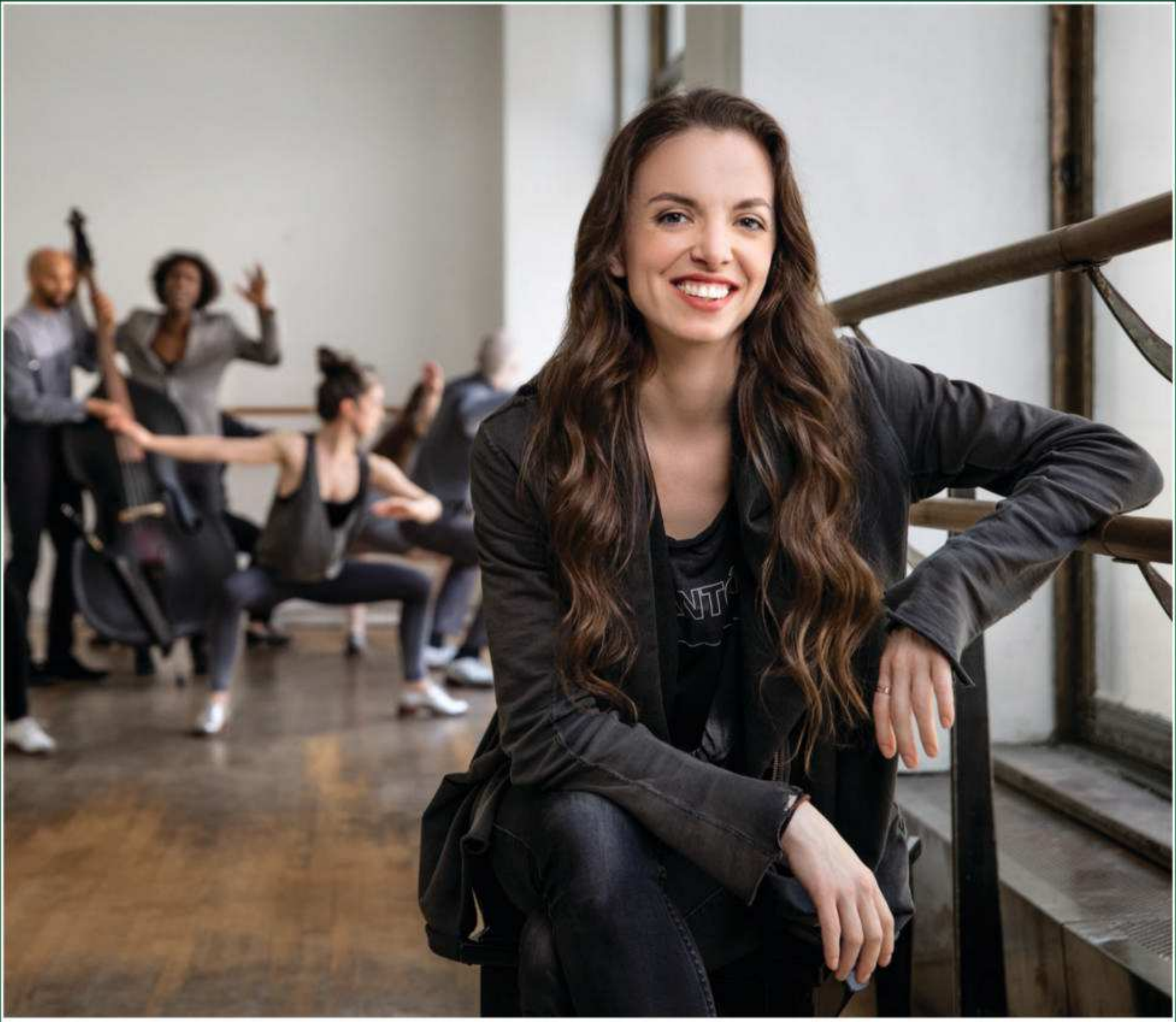
Camp

179 Smith St., Brooklyn (718-852-8086)

Eight Brooklynites, assembled at a bar counter, had a choice: succumb to what seemed to be the truth of a cold Tuesday in the city, or, dreamily, agree that the venue, as its name suggests, was a log cabin. Kindly, none of them touched the skis or the kayak propped against the walls, lest they test, and ruin, the ruse that an outdoor sporting adventure was possible. Instead, in a dirge of a campfire song, the aspirant vacationers tapped smartphones and, occasionally, spoke. "What kind of camp is this?" a woman asked the bartender. The wallpaper, a spectral forest, gleamed under green spotlights. "Nowhere specifically," he told her. Ministering to the sudden ontological crisis he had inspired, the bartender prepared a tray of s'mores fixings for her and her friend, then lit a tiny blue fire. "It's gel," he explained. One woman tried, with increasing alarm, to toast, rather than set furiously ablaze, a resistant marshmallow. She gave up and confronted her Dirty Girl Scout (vanilla vodka, Baileys, and mint). The bartender and a man sitting alone observed this tableau. They discussed diabetes, then dentistry. Another man began to talk to his barstool neighbor, cautiously at first, then generously, as one might while sharing the loneliness of cross-country ski trails or open water. One way to think about science fiction, he said, "is that it's looking at the way reality operates, and testing the boundaries." One of the women found that her hand, smothered in deconstructed marshmallows, stuck unappealingly to her wineglass. She wished, woozy enough with sugar to believe anything, that the boundaries of reality were otherwise.*—Elizabeth Barber*

PHOTOGRAPH BY COLE WILSON FOR THE NEW YORKER; ILLUSTRATION BY JOOST SWARTE


NEWS
OCT
Onelink



THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
DREAM ON

John Kelly, Donald Trump's chief of staff, last week joined the ranks of senior officials who have reportedly declared that the President is "an idiot," in this instance because he "doesn't even understand what DACA is." (Kelly later said that the report, from NBC News, was "total B.S.") In fairness to Trump, though, few people in his Administration seem to fully grasp the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program—which has been in place since 2012—much less what it means for the seven hundred thousand young people, known as Dreamers, whom it has shielded from deportation.

Kelly, who is an immigration hard-liner, also said, according to NBC, that he had stopped the President from making a "hasty deal" that would have helped the Dreamers; on a separate occasion, he had suggested that anyone eligible for DACA who hadn't yet signed up for it was, perhaps, just "lazy." Attorney General Jeff Sessions, when he announced last year that the Administration would phase out the program after March 5th, portrayed President Barack Obama as an outlaw for having approved it in the first place. Sessions called Obama's act "an unconstitutional exercise of authority"—which it is not really his job to peremptorily assert—and said that he was rescinding it in order to "end the lawlessness."

It takes more than insinuations about the legitimacy of Obama's actions, though, to prevail in court. A number of parties quickly challenged the Administration's decision; so far, its arguments, which have also included claiming that judges have no authority to review the decision to end DACA, have not fared well. In the Ninth and Second Circuits, judges found that the cancellation of the program appeared to be "arbitrary and capricious." Their rulings scuttled the March deadline, and have allowed DACA enrollees to renew their status. On April 24th, in another blow to the Administration, a judge in the D.C. Circuit—John D. Bates, a George W. Bush appointee—found that the Administration had left the legal basis for its actions "virtually unexplained," and ordered it to begin enrolling new Dreamers in ninety days' time if it couldn't come up with better legal arguments by then.

The delays have offered the Dreamers both continued uncertainty and something of a respite. But the legal fight has now arrived at a critical juncture, and it could quickly turn against them. Oral arguments in Trump's appeal of the Ninth Circuit case, in which the lead plaintiff was the University of California, will be heard next week. The next stop is the Supreme Court. As with other cases—notably, Trump's attempt to impose a travel ban—the President's critics have relied on the incompetence of the Administration and the rectitude of the courts to see the country through. Yet those factors may provide only a temporary safeguard. The Administration's clumsiness has already prompted others to step in. Last week, Texas, joined by six other states—Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Nebraska, South Carolina, and West Virginia—filed a suit in the Fifth Circuit against the federal government, challenging DACA's constitutionality. In effect, Texas is suing the Trump Administration for not doing what Trump has said he wants it to do—that is, end DACA. A ruling in Texas's favor could create new conflicts between circuits which only the Supreme Court can resolve. Given the composition of the Court, and the room for improvement in the Administration's legal arguments, the Dreamers could lose.



If Trump needs an example of how badly such an outcome can contort a society, one can be found in the United Kingdom, in what has become known as the Windrush scandal. In 2012, Prime Minister Theresa May, who was then the Home Secretary, said that the Conservative government's goal was to create "a really hostile environment for illegal migration." To that end, the government

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

began demanding proof of people's legal status in Britain for many everyday matters—such as visiting a National Health Service doctor, or applying for a job. This posed a particular problem for members of the so-called Windrush generation, who were born in the colonies and moved to Britain after the Second World War. (The Windrush was a ship that carried one of the early groups from the West Indies.) A 1971 law gave those who had arrived prior to that year leave to remain in the nation indefinitely, but provided no definitive documentation with which they could prove that they had done so. (The government destroyed the archive of landing cards in 2010.) The damage the policy had done was largely ignored until last month, when the *Guardian* documented cases of people who were denied critical medical care, evicted from their homes, or threatened with deportation to countries where, like many Dreamers, they had not lived for decades. The current Home Secretary has resigned, as the government, now facing a political crisis, rushes to pass around blame, Trump style.

The May government and the Trump Administration seem to have willfully misunderstood how much the Windrush generation and the Dreamers have enriched their countries. But the Democrats also need to reckon with their mistakes on DACA. Even as the cases have been moving through the courts, the Democrats have behaved as though they had all the time in the world to act—the removal of the March deadline seems to have led to procrastination. Perhaps they are trying to forget last January's bungled government shutdown, which they staged in the Dreamers' name, but which gained them nothing. The Party will need better tactics to secure a permanent legislative fix—a new Dream Act. The midterm elections are just six months away, and how strongly the Party makes its case for preserving DACA may prove crucial in some states; Texas is home to more than a hundred thousand DACA-enrolled Dreamers, many of whom have family members who can vote.

Trump turned his attention to the midterms last week, at a rally in Michigan, where he made it clear that he thinks border demagoguery will provide the Republican Party with another path to victory. "Our laws are so corrupt and so stupid," he said. "I call them the dumbest immigration laws anywhere on earth." He told the crowd, "The liberal politicians who support criminal aliens, and they support them far over American citizens—Nancy Pelosi and her gang—they've got to be voted out of office!" The 2016 election showed that, if not adequately countered, bigotry and fear-mongering can yield crowds, votes, and the power of high office. In that sense, Trump understands DACA very well.

—*Amy Davidson Sorkin*

THE WAYWARD PRESS
EMBEDDED



For reasons of professional decorum, the *Times* does not attend the annual dinner of the White House Correspondents' Association. So, two Saturdays ago, on the day of the dinner, editors and reporters from the paper's Washington bureau were available to travel to New York for a gala screening of "The Fourth Estate," a Showtime documentary series about themselves. The event involved a red carpet, praise from Robert De Niro, and strawberries dipped in chocolate at an open-bar after-party.

Before the screening, Dean Baquet, the paper's executive editor, met a few colleagues and their partners for supper at Locanda Verde, in Tribeca. They were joined by Liz Garbus, who, for the first year of the Trump Presidency, shot "The Fourth Estate" in the *Times'* New York and D.C. offices. The first episode starts with Baquet watching the Inauguration in his newsroom. "Wow, what a story," he says softly. "What a fucking story." And then: "O.K., let's go."

At one end of the table, Dan Cogan, Garbus's husband, who just won an Oscar for producing "Icarus," a documentary about Russian Olympic doping, talked to Mark Mazzetti, the *Times* reporter who, with others, just won a Pulitzer for his reporting on connections between Trump advisers and Russia. Cogan described his sense of loss, on the night of the Oscars, after he lent his statuette to colleagues to help them crash parties. "After an hour, I was, like, 'Where is the precious? Need the precious,'" he said. "I was Gollum." He asked Mazzetti, "Does the Pulitzer have a physical thing?"

"Well, you get a certificate," Mazzetti said.

At the other end of the table, Baquet returned to his place after taking a call from A. G. Sulzberger, the *Times'* publisher. He sat beside his wife, Dylan Landis, a fiction writer, and opposite Elisabeth Bumiller, the paper's Washington bureau chief. They discussed a scene in "The Fourth Estate" in which Maggie Haberman, who reports for the *Times* from inside Donald Trump's head, is seen interviewing the President on the phone. When Trump asks to go off the record, Haberman agrees; the film bleeps out his next words.

"I'm not sure that Presidents should go off the record," Baquet said. "Reporters disagree with me." He went on, "I don't think the President can go off the record unless he wants to talk about coverage. If the President calls me up and says, 'I think your coverage of the Middle East sucks,' that's O.K., because he's got to have an outlet to do it. And I can't imagine putting the phone down." He recalled that during the Obama Administration, which began when Baquet was Washington bureau chief, he never met the President.

"You did," Bumiller said.

"I never went to the Christmas party!"

Bumiller reminded him of a journalism-awards dinner in 2016.

"You're right, you're right!" Baquet laughed. "I was in the receiving line, that's the only time." Steven Weisman, Bumiller's husband, a former *Times* writer, said, happily, "She corrected you."

"So what do you do when Trump goes to the back of Air Force One?" Bumiller asked Baquet. "You're captive, on a transatlantic flight, and he comes back and talks to the press pool off the record. Do you go to the bathroom for an hour?"

He laughed. "I have to say that I've never been in that moral position."

Weisman suggested, deadpan, that perhaps Obama had a policy of avoiding Baquet.

"I would have played basketball with



him," Baquet said. "Obama would call columnists. I'm sure he called Brooks."

"Oh, *yeah*," Bumiller said.

At times, "The Fourth Estate" follows journalists into their homes. "I should never have let them in my kitchen at six in the morning," Bumiller said.

"It's good for people to see that," Baquet said.

"You notice where I was at that hour?" Weisman said. "Cowering upstairs."

Baquet continued, "It's good for people to see that Maggie Haberman, whom they send nasty notes to, is a parent raising a family while she's working sixteen hours a day."

Landis asked her husband, "You remember you put your phone in the safe, in Mexico?" She explained, "It was my sixtieth. It was his present. When we walked on the beach, it was in the safe."

The group walked around the corner to the theatre and was photographed on a red carpet. "That was weird," Baquet said. Before the screening, De Niro made a speech about "Trump's bellowing bullshit," and, to whooping and applause, explained, "I want to put him in handcuffs, and I want to take him to jail."

Baquet squirmed. "I should have guessed," he said later. "It's a very liberal New York art crowd." He took care, in a Q. & A., to say, "Our job is not to be the opposition."

At the party, a White House reporter who, in "The Fourth Estate," is seen making colleagues laugh, was invited to join the writing staff of "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert." Other guests pressed praise on Baquet. "I'm not used to being in a place where this many people seem to like me," he said. "It makes me suspicious."

—Ian Parker

ODD COUPLE
MIRROR, MIRROR



Seth Rogen was in town from L.A. recently, and dropped in on the airy studio of the furniture-design firm Bower, in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. Rogen, who is best known for playing lovably goofy stoners, is also a director, screenwriter, and producer. But his meeting at Bower was dedicated to another type of business. The organizers of Sight Unseen Offsite, an annual design fair, had invited professional designers to pair up with well-known amateurs to create one-of-a-kind objects that would be displayed and then sold to benefit a charity of the collaborators' choice. Rogen joined the Bower partners, who, with his help, dreamed up a large round mirror made of curved segments, to resemble a flattened reflective beach ball. The proceeds will go to Hilarity for Charity, a foundation created by Rogen and his wife, Lauren Miller Rogen, to combat Alzheimer's.



Seth Rogen

At the studio, Danny Giannella and Jeffrey Renz, two of the Bower partners (the third, Tammer Hijazi, was out of town), gave Rogen and his wife a progress report. They began by showing a mood board they had put together, based on some visual references that Rogen had provided over the phone. The images were tacked up neatly in the firm's office, in the back of the studio, which is lined with sleek Op-arty mirrors that are, as Renz said, "our bread and butter." They included an ad for the heat-sensitive T-shirt brand Hypercolor ("They used to sell this shit at science museums!" Rogen recalled), stills from the movie "Back to the Future 2" and the TV series "Saved by the Bell," and the brown-red-and-orange-patterned hotel carpet from "The Shining": light psychedelia as filtered through the self-consciously plasticky lens of the nineteen-eighties and nineties.

"I've always been into really bright-colored art," Rogen said. Bearded and bespectacled, with a rumbling basso, he had on an orange Carhartt sweatshirt and a gray baseball cap. "It's amazing that you drew 'Saved by the Bell' from our conversation," he said. "I've seen literally every single episode!"

"We were thinking of graffiti and vibrant colors," Giannella said. He was wearing the Brooklyn-designer uniform of a baseball cap and chunky-framed glasses. The backing of the Rogen mirror would be painted with bands of color, which would show in the gaps between the glass segments.

"Usually, we try to hide the seams," Renz, who had the blunt-cut bob and beard of a supporting character in Shakespeare, said.

"But you'll still see yourself," Giannella said.

"I hate looking at myself!" Rogen said, laughing.

The collaboration with Bower is Rogen's first professional design project, although weighing in on the making of movie sets and props is part of his job as a producer and director.

"For 'This Is the End,' we built a whole house. We designed every corner of it," he said, referring to the apocalyptic comedy that he directed with Evan Goldberg. "At first I was, like, 'I'm designing the douchiest house in the world for James Franco' "—who, in the movie, plays a pretentious art collector with a mid-century-modern fixation—"and, by the end of it, everyone was, like, 'You designed the house *you* want to live in.' And I was, like, 'Oh, shit, I did.' "

"There are similarities between that house and our house, now that I think of it," Miller Rogen, who was wearing a striped button-down and a fitted motorcycle jacket, said.

Recently, Rogen and Goldberg directed and produced a TV pilot set in 1986. "As soon as something is period, you have to pick *everything,*" he said. "Shoes, watches, hats, glasses, what the parking meters look like, what every car on the street looks like. To me, that makes it way more fun— to get into the minutiae."

"It must be hard to make it feel natural," Giannella said. "Like, all the cars can't be red."

"It's true," Rogen said. "Or they can be, and then you're Wes Anderson!"

"Seth has always had a good sense of style and design," Miller Rogen said. "Like his apartment when we first started dating."

"For a twenty-three-year-old guy, it was a pretty nice apartment," Rogen agreed.

"Other than the black leather sofa that you're obligated to buy as a young man, when you start getting chest hair," Miller Rogen said.

"When you're twenty, they're, like, Here's your black leather sofa," Rogen said. "It was 2002," he added, only a little apologetically.

Out in the studio, in front of the wooden circle that would be the mirror's backing, Renz and Giannella unfurled a paper template they had created in AutoCAD. The computer file had been sent to a shop that would cut the glass pieces, which would then be glued onto the wood.

"Whoa, some of these pieces are really little and sharp!" Rogen said.

"Seth, do you want to see your name?" Giannella asked, turning the wooden circle to reveal the words "BOWER X SETH ROGEN" on the back.

Rogen leaned closer. "You spelled it right! It happens, I would say, one per cent of the time," he said. "That's so cool. It's incredible. I'm like Virgil Abloh." He laughed uproariously.

—*Naomi Fry*

NO NUKES DEPT.
MAMA LEADER



On a recent afternoon, Beatrice Fihn, the Swedish antinuclear activist, walked into a Tribeca café to address her next audience: sixty new mothers and about forty of their children, most under three years old. "It's not so different than the U.N., you know," she told the group. "Lots of crybabies."

The thirty-five-year-old Fihn is the executive director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, which won the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize. Owing to its efforts, last July the United Nations adopted a treaty to ban nuclear weapons, by a vote of a hundred and twenty-two to one. (Sixty-nine nations did not vote.) In order for the treaty to take effect, fifty countries must ratify it. So far, seven have.

The day before the Tribeca talk, the French President, Emmanuel Macron, had told reporters that he was pretty sure Trump was going to withdraw from the Iran deal; a few hours after Fihn's talk, the North Korean leader, Kim Jong Un, met with South Korea's President, Moon Jae-in, to discuss negotiating nuclear weapons away from North Korea. The world was paying attention.

"That's the silver lining, I guess," Fihn said, crossing one sling-back heel over the other. She is tall and has long blond hair. "With someone else in power, it would be easy not to think about a finger on the button. With Trump, it's in the air."

The event was sponsored by Mindr, an organization, founded by a disenchanted new mother, Sarah Lux-Lee, to provide new parents with opportunities to engage with the world beyond Mommy & Me classes. Lux-Lee, an Australian, graduated from Columbia University with a master's degree in public administration and six weeks later gave birth to her daughter, Ella, who is now almost two.

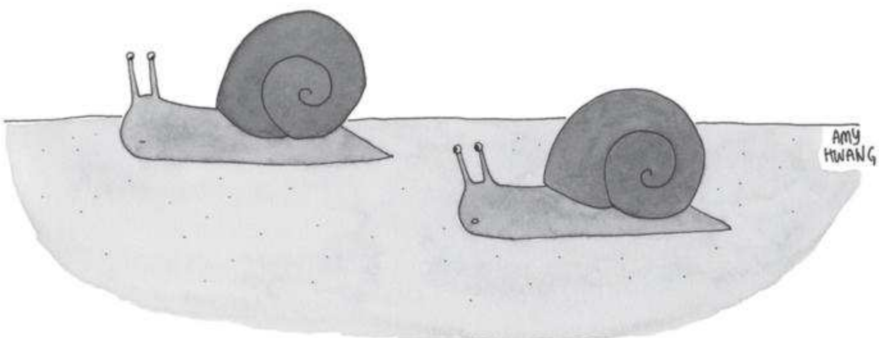
"I went from being in the most intellectually enriching environment—sitting in a room with Hillary Clinton talking about the campaign process—to this moment where all I was good for was singing 'The Wheels on the Bus,'" she said, as mothers trickled in. Once she had the idea for Mindr, she started small, inviting a few mom friends to hear a Columbia professor talk at a local restaurant that didn't mind a few drooling toddlers. In March, for International Women's Day, she helped facilitate more than five hundred new mothers and their children sitting in, nursing, teething, and snoozing at the United Nations. On the Mindr Web site, she pronounced Fihn "one of the strongest mama-leaders of our time."

Surveying the setup, Lux-Lee said, "I resisted play mats for a long time, because of the optics, but at least I found one that's understated." In the center of the room, next to the understated play mat, sat a basket filled with toys. Mothers drifted in, some with babies strapped to them, others lurching after toddlers grabbing for the cookie tray.

Lauren Smith Brody, the author of "The Fifth Trimester: The Working Mom's Guide to Style, Sanity, & Big Success After Baby," came solo, though she has two boys. "The nine-year-old is really interested in nuclear energy, actually, but he has tutoring," she said. When she gave birth to him, she was working at *Glamour*. "I came back after leave and realized I hadn't read a newspaper," she said.

With the clock ticking—everyone had to get home for dinner and bath time—Lux-Lee fired questions at Fihn. She asked about the United States' negotiating tactics (Fihn: "It's a bizarre attitude, that you have to humiliate and beat the other guy"), the warped valuation we give nuclear weapons ("People are talking about Trump and North Korea like Reagan and the Reykjavík summit—North Korea is not the Soviet Union!"), and the role of women in nuclear disarmament.

"I don't believe women are more peaceful than men," Fihn said. "But they are assigned roles in society, and they are caretakers. So they think,



"Everyone I know has a crazy long commute."

Who's going to clean up *after* the war?"

When asked how she balanced work and family (she has two kids: Holly, six, and Henry, three) she told the crowd, "I've trained myself to say, even to ambassadors and diplomats, that I have to pick up my kids. If I pretend I'm busy with other work, it makes it just my problem. And it's society that has to fix it." The room burst into applause. A toddler violently dropped her doll to join in.

By the time Lux-Lee opened the floor to a Q. & A., a good number of attendees were on the floor, some changing diapers, others gnawing on stuffed animals. A question from the play mat: "What can *we* do about nuclear disarmament?"

"You can say, 'I think these weapons are illegitimate!'" Fihn said. "We see it like the smoking ban. We'll make it harder, make it stigmatized. You want to smoke? Go outside."

Fihn said that, while she finds it difficult to talk to her daughter about her job, she has told her just enough. "She asked me, 'So are you going to put Trump in prison now?' And I said, 'Well, other people are working on that.'"

—*Sophie Brickman*

LONDON POSTCARD
PEACHY



Diana Henry estimates that she's hosted two hundred meals in the nine years she's lived in her house, in North London. Experience hasn't dispelled the romance, or the anxiety, that comes along with the desire to make every occasion special. Once, Henry was roasting a sea bass when a guest came into the kitchen and confided that her husband was having an affair. "I did want to sympathize but, really, I was more worried about overcooking the fish," Henry writes, in "How to Eat a Peach," her eleventh and most recent cookbook. Henry will get out a trestle table for a crab feast. She will start infusing prunes with Monbazillac wine a month early in order to serve, at a supper inspired by her memories of travelling in southwestern France, just the right apéritif. Reading her menus—one included fennel *taralli;* burrata with fennel, roasted peppers, anchovies, and capers; spaghetti and shellfish *al cartoccio;* and ricotta ice cream with candied lemon and pistachios—was enough, recently, to compel a normally well-mannered person to angle for an invitation. Alas, Henry's two teen-age sons were studying for exams and needed quiet. It seemed only right to take her out for dinner.

Henry chose Brawn, a whitewashed small-plates restaurant in Bethnal Green. When her dining companion arrived, she was sitting at a wooden table in front of a high window with a blood-orange Negroni. "*Gougères!*" she said, proffering a plate. "You don't see them very often." "How to Eat a Peach" is the culmination of a habit that Henry began as a sixteen-year-old on the coast of Northern Ireland, when she covered a school exercise book in gift wrap and began jotting down menus for meals she might someday, somewhere serve. There is a lusty memoir embedded amid the recipes. Pork rillettes are the spring of 1982, when she worked as an au pair for a family of Bordelais zookeepers: a patriarch who never spoke except to ask for salt, and a "bird-like grandma with her floral housecoats and heavily pencilled eyebrows," distraught over the death of Romy Schneider. *Tinga poblana* is a bad breakup. Oysters mignonette is learning to like something after you're far too old to think you might.

At Brawn, the menu was printed on a sheet of white paper. It took only a few seconds to decide: crab, mussels, scallop tartare, veal ragu, and lamb sweetbreads. "The food is almost, but not quite, coarse," Henry said. "This is a love-life menu, honestly." She ordered a bottle of white wine and reminisced about a boyfriend she'd had as a foreign-exchange student in France. His recipe for *crêpes dentelles* remains accessible, even if the urgency of their affair is lost to time. Henry said, "I reread D. H. Lawrence last year, and just laughed."

Her ambitions as a hostess have dimmed only slightly since the time, in high school, that she invited five classmates over for a candlelit supper of pineapple water ice. "I used to do stupid things," she recalled later. "Make tortelloni for ten—as a starter, had to cook the rest of the meal as well—all in one day, that kind of thing. Guests turned up thirty minutes early one night, and I was still in my underwear, lightly dusted with flour, pinching pasta dough. I'm not that mad now."



Diana Henry

One of the most literary of food writers, Henry will advise slicing the "tufty bit" off the base of a leek. You're tempted to think that her instructions for making elderflower gin ("Close the jar and shake it every day for 1 week") derive less from necessity than from appreciation for the perfect Anglo-Saxon imperative sentence. "Even just visualizing them being poured makes your shoulders drop," she writes, of a dish that involves olive oil and copious amounts of honey. Beneath her hedonism, there is a liquid-heavy undercurrent of longing. "I could have filled the book twice over," she said, spiralling pasta onto her fork. "I was writing it at a time in my life when I just wanted to go underwater." She had recently split from her partner and was dealing with family illness. She sat at her desk from dusk until three o'clock in the morning, the only lit window in sight. "Everybody thinks this is sluttish," she said. "I don't get dressed all day. I'm in my pajamas. But there's a blank screen, and that's controllable." One of the unanticipated pleasures of being single, she said, is reading, writing, and cooking as late into the night as she wants to.

It was almost midnight. The way to eat a peach is to halve it, pit it, slice it, and drop it into a glass of cold moscato. Henry saw a group of locals do that in a restaurant on the last night of her first trip to Italy, decades ago, and never forgot it. For the moment, she made do with panna cotta.

—*Lauren Collins*

AMERICAN CHRONICLES

THE VAPORS

Juul is saving smokers from cancer. It's also getting kids hooked on nicotine.

By Jia Tolentino



If I get addicted to vaping, I thought, in March, I will always remember this Texas strip mall. I was walking out of a store called Smoke-N-Chill Novelties, in Southwest Austin, holding a receipt for $62.95 and two crisp, white shrink-wrapped boxes. I got into the driver's seat of a rental car and began to open them. From one I extracted a Juul: a slim black vaporizer about half the width and weight of a Bic lighter, with rounded edges and a gently burnished finish. (It looks like a flash drive, everyone always points out. You can recharge it by plugging it into your computer.) From the other I extracted a thumbnail-size cartridge called a pod, filled with juice containing a cigarette pack's worth of nicotine. The juice in my pod was cucumber-flavored. This was an odd choice, I was later told; of Juul's eight flavors, people tend to prefer mango, or mint. I inserted the pod into the Juul, and a little light on the device glowed green. I took a sharp experimental inhalation and nearly jumped. It felt as if a tiny ghost had rushed out of the vaporizer and slapped me on the back of my throat.

I took another hit, and another. Each one was a white spike of nothing: a pop, a flavored coolness, as if the idea of a cucumber had just vanished inside my mouth. As I pulled out of the parking lot, my scalp tingled. To Juul (the brand has become a verb) is to inhale nicotine free from the seductively disgusting accoutrements of a cigarette: the tar, the carbon monoxide, the garbage mouth, the smell. It's an uncanny simulacrum of smoking. An analyst at Wells Fargo projects that this year the American vaporizer market will grow to five and a half billion dollars, an increase of more than twenty-five per cent from 2017. In the latest data, sixty per cent of that market belongs to Juul.

"Smoking is gross," a high schooler said. "Juuling is really what's up."

That's just a fraction of what old-fashioned smoking brings in—the U.S. cigarette market is worth a hundred and twenty billion dollars. But it's a fast rise after a long wait: inventors have been attempting to develop a successful electronic cigarette since the nineteen-sixties. Traditional cigarettes pair nicotine—which, contrary to common belief, does not cause cancer—with an arsenal of carcinogenic substances. As the harm-reduction pioneer Michael Russell said, in 1976, "People smoke for the nicotine, but they die from the tar." And so people keep looking for healthier ways to deliver a fix. Philip Morris and R. J. Reynolds have reportedly invested billions in creating so-called heat-not-burn products, which generate smoke from tobacco at lower temperatures than cigarettes do—but early versions of these, released in the eighties, flopped. More recent efforts are still awaiting F.D.A. review.

In 2003, a Chinese pharmacist named Hon Lik patented the first version of today's standard e-cigarette: a device that vaporizes liquid nicotine through a heating element. (Imagine a handheld humidifier that's hot and full of nicotine.) The following year, two product-design grad students at Stanford, Adam Bowen and James Monsees, decided that they could disrupt Big Tobacco: they created a startup called Ploom, which launched formally, in San Francisco, three years later. In 2012, they came out with the Pax, a vaporizer that resembled, as *Inc.* put it, "a stubby iPhone." You could load it with weed as well as with loose-leaf tobacco. (They later sold the Ploom brand and one of their vaporizer lines to a Japanese outfit and became Pax Labs.)

Soon afterward, they began work on the Juul, choosing a name that evoked

PHOTOGRAPH BY ELIZABETH RENSTROM

both a precious stone and the amount of energy required to produce one watt of power for one second. The Juul, they decided, would be a nicotine-only device, squarely targeted at the roughly one billion cigarette smokers in the world. (Both Bowen and Monsees are former smokers who switched to vaping with their own early prototypes.) The e-cigarette market was growing, and becoming less independent: a brand called blu, founded in 2009, was acquired by the Lorillard Tobacco Company, in 2012; R. J. Reynolds launched Vuse in 2013. (Reynolds subsequently bought Lorillard and sold blu to the British multinational Imperial Brands.) But the more advanced vapes were either unattractively large or required users to monitor finicky temperature settings, coils, and wicks. Bowen and Monsees gave each Juul its own circuit board and firmware, removing the need for technical know-how and insuring better control, and managed to fit it all into a small device. After a series of focus groups with longtime smokers, they developed a flavor strategy: a tobacco profile, a mint profile, a fruit profile, a dessert profile. For the design, they avoided the roundness of a cigarette, and the glowing tip, because they wanted people who used the Juul to feel as if they were doing something new.

Their biggest breakthrough was chemical. Since the sixties, cigarette companies, starting with Philip Morris, have freebased nicotine using ammonia, which liberates the nicotine so that it can be speedily absorbed into the lungs and the brain. As one addiction expert has said, "The modern cigarette does to nicotine what crack does to cocaine." Pax Labs discovered that by adding benzoic acid to nicotine salts, which occur naturally in tobacco, they could mimic a cigarette's rapid nicotine delivery.

Nicotine is both a stimulant and a relaxant: it peps you up when you're tired, and if you're anxious it calms you down. Historically, people have smoked tobacco as soon as they come into contact with it—Native Americans took it up thousands of years ago, the English got started in the sixteenth century—with anti-tobacco campaigns often following closely behind. King James I's 1604 treatise "A Counterblaste to Tobacco" called tobacco a "filthie noveltie" that was "hatefull to the Nose" and "harmefull to the braine."

He wasn't wrong: the nicotine in tobacco binds to receptors in multiple regions of the brain, raising dopamine levels and mimicking a key neurotransmitter that affects focus and arousal. This is so pleasing—and life so arduous—that nearly forty million Americans currently smoke, despite knowing that it may give them lung cancer. (Before the cigarette-rolling machine was invented, in the late nineteenth century, lung cancer was a rare disease.) The younger the brain, the more easily its reward circuits can be manipulated: the vast majority of adult smokers began before age eighteen.

This is at least partly why parents are freaking out about the Juul, which has become a ubiquitous presence at high schools in America's more affluent Zip Codes—precisely those places where, in recent decades, smoking has declined the most. (The vaporizers retail for $34.99, and a four-pack of pods costs $15.99. In February, at a press conference after the Parkland shooting, a student said that he no longer thought of Marjory Stoneman Douglas as "just a school of entitled children and those who Juul.") Each week brings dozens of local news stories sounding the same alarm: innocent, vulnerable, sneaky American teen-agers are getting hooked. High schools are holding informational sessions about vaping, sending letters home to parents, investing in vape detectors. One school district in Pennsylvania banned flash drives. "We are seeing the vaping and the 'Juuling' across the board," a substance-abuse counsellor in Arlington, Virginia, told a local radio station, surmising that vapes might contain "cocaine liquid." (It is possible, though difficult, to crack open a Juul pod and fill it with your own liquid. This would be a complicated and perhaps unprecedented way to do cocaine.) An assistant principal in North Dakota warned the Grand Forks *Herald* about the dangers of e-cigarette liquid, which he had inadvertently touched after confiscating a bottle that he found in a student's backpack. Soon afterward, he began to feel nauseated and "real emotional," he said.

As fears about youth Juuling have intensified, calls for a government crackdown have increased. The F.D.A. did not regulate e-cigarettes as tobacco products until 2016. (Previously, it attempted to regulate them as "drug-delivery devices," but that approach was struck down in court.) Now e-cigarette companies must submit a premarket tobacco application, or P.M.T.A., in order to keep their products on the market. (The process is complex and expensive, and will probably put smaller independent vape companies out of business.) The deadline for this application was planned for this year, then pushed back to 2022. In March, the American Heart Association, the American Lung Association, and several other groups sued the F.D.A., arguing that the delay needlessly exposes consumers to "lethal and addictive" substances. In April, eleven senators, including Chuck Schumer and Elizabeth Warren, sent an open letter to Juul Labs—which was spun off from Pax last June—asserting that Juul's products are "putting an entire new generation of children at risk of nicotine addiction and other health consequences."

Cigarette smoking is still the No. 1 cause of preventable death in this country, killing nearly five hundred thousand people each year. (According to some studies, more than half of longtime smokers will die from smoking-related complications.) It's incredibly hard to stop smoking; people spend lifetimes trying. Around seventy per cent of American smokers say that they want to quit, and for many of them e-cigarettes have been a godsend. But, according to a 2017 study by the C.D.C., about fifty per cent more high schoolers and middle schoolers vape than smoke. Young people have taken a technology that was supposed to help grownups stop smoking and invented a new kind of bad habit, one that they have molded in their own image. The potential public-health benefit of the e-cigarette is being eclipsed by the unsettling prospect of a generation of children who may really love to vape.

If you're over forty, your idea of smoking was likely shaped by Madison Avenue and Hollywood: the strong-jawed cowboy lighting a Marlboro, Lauren Bacall asking for a match. Juul has been defined by Instagram and Snapchat. The company's official Instagram account, @juulvapor, is age-appropriate and fairly boring—it has an aesthetic reminiscent of *Real Simple,* and forty-four thousand followers. But viral, teen-centric Juul fan accounts like @doit4juul (a hundred and ten thousand followers) are populated

with a different sort of imagery: a body-builder Juuling in a tank top that says "Real Men Eat Ass"; a baby (labelled "me") being shoved into a birthday cake ("the Juul") by her mom ("my nicotine addiction"); a topless college student who has a Juul in her mouth and is wearing a pink hat that says "Daddy." Teen Juul iconography radiates a dirtbag silliness. Vapes are meme-ready, funny in a way that cigarettes never were: the black-and-white photograph of James Dean smoking in shirtsleeves has been replaced with paparazzi snaps of Ben Affleck ripping an e-cig in his car. In one popular video, a girl tries to Juul with four corn dogs in her mouth. In another, teens at a party suck on a flash drive that they've mistaken for a Juul. "I know one of the girls in that video!" a high-school senior from Maryland told me. "It was a *huge* deal at my school."

Juuling and scrolling through Instagram offer strikingly similar forms of contemporary pleasure. Both provide stimulus when you're tired and fidgety, and both tend to become mindless tics that fit neatly into rapidly diminishing amounts of free time. (You can take two Juul hits and double-tap a bunch of pics in about ten seconds. You need an inefficient five minutes to burn a paper tube of tar and leaves into ash.) The omnipresence of Juul on social media has undoubtedly made kids overestimate the extent of teen Juuling—young people tend to think that their peers drink, smoke, and hook up more than they actually do. And it's all beyond regulation: the F.D.A. can control the behavior of companies advertising nicotine for profit, but it can do nothing about teens advertising nicotine to one another for free.

A high-school sophomore named Kate, from Houston, told me that the Juulers she knows have their own cars to vape in and cash to spare. You have to be twenty-one to shop at Juul's online store, and the company requires a match between public records, credit-card information, and government I.D. (The site turns more than a quarter of would-be purchasers away, inadvertently filtering out many adults who have recently moved.) But kids can buy Juuls in bulk on eBay and Alibaba with prepaid debit cards and a little creativity. Juul has a team devoted to taking down such listings, but the company says that it's like "playing Whac-a-Mole." "And if you deal Juul you can make a *lot* of money," Kate said. She described multiple levels and types of Juul dealers at her school: some sold pods, some sold devices, some would do bootleg refills if you wanted a different flavor or THC oil instead. (The resale markup is partly what makes Juuling an expensive habit for teens. Juul is not subject to cigarette taxes, though, so in places where they're high—New York, New England, Chicago—Juuling can otherwise be cheaper than smoking.)



I talked to a sixteen-year-old girl in Westchester County, whom I'll call Leslie, to keep her from narcing on her classmates. Juuls caught on at her school last summer, she said. Upperclassmen bought them, underclassmen tried them at parties, and suddenly people were Juuling in the cafeteria, charging Juuls on their laptops, and filling their Instagram and Snapchat feeds with Juuling videos and GIFS. "Dealers will announce on Snapchat that they've bought a hundred of them, and they'll write the price, the date, and the meeting place for kids to show up with cash," Leslie said. She described her classmates Juuling in locker rooms, and on the trail behind the school—where people also drink and smoke weed—and in the quad, if they're ballsy. "But the biggest spots are the bathrooms," she said. "There are so many people Juuling sometimes that all the varieties of flavors just get morphed into one big vape. Some days I'm just, like, why do you need to do this at 11 A.M.?"

The high-school students I talked to took a level of ambient stress for granted, as if it were like the iPhone—a nonnegotiable condition of everyday life. Did people Juul because they were anxious? Of course, they said, as though I'd asked whether they ate when they were hungry. Leslie had also noticed "a weird paradox," she said. "You're expected to Juul, but you're expected to not depend on it. If you're cool, then you Juul with other people, and you post about it, so everyone will see that you're social and ironic and funny. But, if you're addicted, you go off by yourself and Juul because you need it, and everyone knows." Like all the teen-agers I talked to, she thought of the Juul as something made for people like her. "I'm always surprised when I see an adult with a Juul," she said. "It's sort of like seeing my grandma with an Alexa."

"Let's be clear," Jonathan Winickoff, the former chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics Tobacco Consortium, which is trying to end youth smoking, told me in March. "Juul is already a massive public-health disaster—and without dramatic action it's going to get much, much, much worse."

Winickoff is a pediatrician at Massachusetts General Hospital and a professor at Harvard Medical School. A few weeks after we spoke, the American Academy of Pediatrics joined the American Lung Association and others in their lawsuit against the F.D.A. "If you were to design your ideal nicotine-delivery device to addict large numbers of United States kids, you'd invent Juul," Winickoff said. "It's absolutely unconscionable. The earlier these companies introduce the product to the developing brain, the better the chance they have a lifelong user."

Winickoff believes that the vape industry is co-opting the national wellness trend—"when, in fact, vaping can cause something called bronchiolitis obliterans, or popcorn lung," he said. Popcorn lung has been linked to diacetyl, an organic compound that some companies use in their e-liquid, and that has been detected as a by-product of e-cigarette vapor. But diacetyl has also been detected in cigarette smoke, at a level hundreds of times greater, and no feasible amount of smoking has been found to cause popcorn lung. (Juul does not use diacetyl in its liquid, and, in tests, the company has found no measurable amounts of diacetyl in the vapor emitted by its devices.)

Winickoff is passionate on the subject, and he grew more fervent as we spoke. At one point, he likened e-cigarettes to "bioterrorism." He predicted that, eventually, a state's attorney general would sue Juul "for willfully designing and pushing a product that will cause harm to the children of the United States." He added, "It's extremely hard, once someone is addicted to nicotine, to get them off it. As a clinician, you know that their brain has changed, that it will always be nicotine-hungry. You feel that you have lost that child."

But e-cigarettes are definitively safer than cigarettes, aren't they? There are typically around six hundred ingredients in cigarettes. Juul's e-cigarette liquid contains only five: glycerol, propylene glycol, nicotine, benzoic acid, and food-grade flavoring. Glycerol is a sweet liquid that has been used in antifreeze, giving rise to the urban legend that e-cigarettes contain antifreeze. But it is also used in toothpaste. Propylene glycol is used in asthma nebulizers. Benzoic acid is a common food preservative.

"If you compare the Juul to a thing that kills one out of every two users, of course it's safer," Winickoff said. "And it's not just Juul," he went on. He noted some of the by-products of other e-cigarette vapor, including formaldehyde and trace metals. "There are hundreds of different companies. There's a significant and growing market for bogus, pirated versions of each product." Some companies sell cheaper, Juul-compatible pods in flavors like blueberry, watermelon, and "strawberry milk." Vaping, Winickoff said, was like smoking marijuana: "You don't know what the drug might be laced with."

I had been thinking about the weed comparison. Nicotine is far more addictive than THC, and its use pattern is more intrusive: stoners don't get overpowering physical cravings to hide in airplane bathrooms and hit a bong. But smoking marijuana produces carcinogens—tar, carbon monoxide, ammonia—that vaping nicotine does not, and, as a drug, marijuana has a much more intense psychoactive effect than nicotine. Even so, weed is now legal for recreational use in ten states and in Washington, D.C. In April, Chuck Schumer introduced legislation to decriminalize marijuana at the federal level. It's possible to imagine a future in which nicotine would be viewed as something akin to marijuana—not necessarily great for you, but not catastrophic, either.

I admitted to Winickoff that I was probably endangering my lungs as a weed smoker. He gamely pointed out that I could look into ingested forms of marijuana, and noted that my brain was in a much more stable place than it had been when I was twenty-one.

"Well, maybe," I said. "I've been Juuling a little for this piece."

Winickoff gasped. "Jia, you *can't!*"

Over Easter weekend, I visited my alma mater, the University of Virginia, established by the Founding Father and tobacco farmer Thomas Jefferson. Smoking was still permitted in restaurants when I was an undergrad in Charlottesville, and that was the main reason I started smoking: I waited tables, and it felt good to have a couple of cigarettes when my shift was over, while I was sitting at the bar and having my free beer. (I quit smoking five years after I graduated.) Walking across campus, I noticed that the spots where smokers used to congregate—the sidewalk on the main drag, the benches outside the library—were vacant. I had come to the school to speak on a panel about careers in journalism. When the panel discussion ended, a visiting high-school student introduced herself, and I told her about the story I was working on. "Smoking is gross," she said. "Juuling is really what's up."

Saying the word "Juul" in front of a group of young people with spending money is like dropping an everything bagel into a flock of pigeons in a public park. A sophomore, overhearing our conversation, showed me his Juul: it had "Fuck Off" scratched into one side and "Work Harder" on the other. He was from Colorado, where in the summer, he said, you can drive around Juuling with your windows down and girls in passing cars will go, "Wooo!! Juul!!" The Juul is the "devil's stick," he said. "I hit it from the moment I wake up to the moment I can't go to sleep, and keep Juuling." But at least he was better off than his friend, he said, who had spent $999.46 on pods this year.

While high-school Juuling has prompted local-news horror stories, college Juuling has inspired work in a different genre: the satirical essay. In January, a junior at Cornell named Jason Jeong published a newspaper column called "The Juul Manifesto." ("A spectre is haunting Cornell—the spectre of the Juul.") He argued that the Juul represents his generation's "tech-savvy ingenuity when it comes to making bad decisions." Over the phone, Jason, who grew up in California, told me that he first tried Juul in 2016. "Someone pulls one out at a party, and naturally the question is 'Can I try it?,' and then after 'Can I try it?' five or six times you end up buying your own, and, soon enough, you're breathing in more Juul than air."

At Cornell, Jason told me, people Juuled in bathrooms and classrooms, in "every nook and cranny of this campus." In the fall, he'd started a group text, with a few friends, to coördinate pod runs. He called the group Juuluminati, and it has since grown to three hundred and twenty-four members. Jason was Juuling while he talked to me, on the third floor of an academic building. "I know for a fact

that there are two or three of my good friends sitting on the first floor of this building eating ham sandwiches and just Juuling away," he said.

Jason believes that the Juul craze is fundamentally ironic. "It's young people doing something terrible for them that's supposed to be healthy," he said. He compared the infatuation with Juul to the millennial love of the restaurateur and TV host Guy Fieri—"this completely bizarre food personality that people call Daddy now"—and observed that his generation was most flippant when it came to serious things, "like health, or mortality." Jason was mildly wary of his new nicotine habit, as most young Juulers are. There's a whole genre of throwing-away-my-Juul videos on social media, with people tossing their vape into a river or a snowbank as dramatic music plays.

In Charlottesville, I went to the main library on campus to meet a freshman from Virginia Beach named Katie McCracken, whose contribution to the canon of college Juul-writing was titled "Who Needs a Boyfriend When You Have a Juul?" In high school, she told me, she didn't smoke or know anyone who did. But at U.V.A. people were Juuling in the dorm lounges, trading Juul hits at parties, repping Juul in their Tinder profiles, Juuling inside bars. "There are bouncers who will sell you a cheap Juul because they just find a ton of them on the ground," she said. For college kids, drinking and Juuling go together: people who like buzzes tend to mix them.

Katie's younger brother was a Juuler, she told me—"He does a thing where he Juuls through his nose"—as was her twenty-three-year-old sister, who had switched from cigarettes. ("She sort of looks weird with the Juul, though, because she's older.") "I thought Juuls were so dumb when I first saw them," Katie said. "And then I wrote an article about how Juul is my boyfriend."

She took out her phone, opened Snapchat, and scrolled through her saved pics and videos: people hitting multiple Juuls simultaneously, her friends in dramatic poses with deadpan expressions and Juuls in their mouths. I burst out laughing at one captioned "100% Headass." Remembering how I'd sat in that library a decade earlier, sending a text message every few hours, I briefly felt old and sad. It was hard to imagine being in college and swiping through Tinder, watching Instagram Stories, sucking on electronics, getting push alerts about the warming Arctic and the latest Cabinet secretary to be fired. I asked Katie if she thought that Juul relieved her generation's anxiety or exacerbated it. "I don't know," she said. "People definitely stress-Juul. But everything we do is like Tide Pods. Everyone in this generation is semi-ironically, like, We're ready to die."

She pulled out her Juul, which was covered in iridescent stickers. Personalization is big among young Juulers; some take a blowtorch to the Juul to turn the finish metallic, or buy "Juul skins" from third-party venders. Juul Wraps, a Florida-based company that sells vinyl vape covers—patterns include the American flag and the slogan "I Love Boobies"—has been so successful that one of its three young co-founders recently bought himself a McLaren. ("To say we're surprising our friends and family would be an understatement," one of the other founders told me.)

"Can I . . . maybe hit it?" I asked Katie.

"Here?" she said.

We looked around conspiratorially. The big library lobby was full of people. We were within view of a café, a computer lab, a reference desk. She handed me the Juul, giggling quietly. I stuck it in the wrist of my sweater, inhaled, and blew out a little cloud of vapor. No one noticed. My mouth felt perky.

"Mint!" Katie said.

Three days later, I flew to California to visit Juul's headquarters, in San Francisco. The company had recently moved from a cramped space in the Mission to a renovated warehouse in the Dogpatch, a gentrifying industrial neighborhood that was full of construction equipment beeping gently in the rain. Inside, the office was open-plan and airy, with forest-green trim on the windows and cream-colored walls. A glossy chocolate Labrador sat in the lunchroom, accepting ear scratches in front of an impressive array of snacks—RxBars, Boomchickapop, M&M's, waffle cookies—and four fridges filled with LaCroix seltzer and craft beer. Another dog lounged under the table in one of the conference rooms, which are named for San Francisco landmarks: Ocean Beach, Painted Ladies, Candlestick Park. Everyone looked indeterminately hip and focussed, like figures in an architectural rendering, if such figures occasionally Juuled.

There are now around four hundred Juul employees. The company is hiring so rapidly that about twenty new people show up every week at the all-hands meeting. Many of the new hires come from other tech companies: Tesla, Fitbit, Facebook. Some are former smokers who have switched to Juuling—one of the office's few pieces of visible Juul paraphernalia is a large locked cabinet with a stack of pods that employees can purchase at a discount. But many of the people who work there have never smoked or Juuled, and were averse to even meeting with the company until they were convinced that Juul presented an opportunity to work on a problem of unrivalled magnitude. Ashley Gould, the company's chief administrative officer, has worked at the genetic-testing company 23andMe and for companies that develop treatments for rare diseases. "I came to feel that I could have greater impact on public health here than at any place I had ever worked before," she told me.

At the moment, company executives are putting in long hours on the P.M.T.A. process, gunning to secure F.D.A. approval. Juul vaporizers and pods are built in clean rooms in Chinese factories, the all-white kind that require you to scrub in, as if for surgery; to eliminate human error, the company designed an enormous machine, the size of three bedrooms, for filling the pods. Each device undergoes multiple rounds of inspection. (The tests include hooking the vaporizer up to a hose that simulates a person inhaling for three full minutes.) The liquid for the pods is shipped in five-gallon batches, each of which, the company told me, is subjected to a blind human taste test for consistency. (The liquid is manufactured in the United States, though no one would tell me where; a spokesperson for the company called this "competitive information.")

Juul's C.E.O., Kevin Burns, who is fifty-four, has a friendly dad-who-loves-his-vacation-house demeanor. He came to Juul from Chobani last October. Burns described Juul to me as a "cigarette-killing company." Before he accepted the job, he said, he convened an informal focus group in his kitchen with his son, who's

in high school, and a few of his son's friends. When he asked them about vaping, three kids pulled out their Juuls. He asked them why they had these things, when they got them, how prevalent they were. He realized, he said, that he was looking at a challenge. "We have frustrations about how the product is glorified on social media," he told me.

Juul is caught in a very particular dilemma: the more appealing the product is for smokers, the more appealing it's likely to be for everyone else, including teen-agers. At a Manhattan location of Beyond Vape, in March, a sweet-natured clerk named Christ told me that he had smoked two packs a day since he was a teen-ager and that vapes had saved his life. He showed me a vast array of liquids, and explained the appeal of various flavors for people trying to quit cigarettes. (His favorite: Phillip Rocke Honey Cream.) But Juul is frequently condemned for targeting young people with its sweeter flavors, which are limited to mango, crème brûlée, mixed fruit, and cucumber. The company has refrained from introducing new flavors—though it has prototyped "tons" of them, Adam Bowen said.

Many Juulers I talked to found themselves taking in more nicotine with Juul than they had with cigarettes—going through a pod a day, say, when they were never pack-a-day smokers. A low-nicotine option would help ease their dependency, and the company briefly experimented with lighter formulations. Currently, the pods are five per cent nicotine by weight. "You think, Let's introduce these three-per-cent pods on our most popular flavor—let's do it on mango," Burns said. "But the first thing I'll get after that is a news story about how I'm lowering the bar for young people to initiate." Juul eventually decided to release low-nicotine pods in mint and tobacco, which will be out later this year. Internationally, Juul plans to introduce an Android app that allows users to track their nicotine intake. (A Juul team is now exploring the market in Central and Western Europe, and an Asia team is in the works.)

Last year, Juul added a small gray bar to its packaging that reads "The alternative for adult smokers." The company had considered a bigger, more aggressive statement, but executives were afraid that it would make the product seem edgy, like a parental-advisory warning on a CD cover. (They are also considering dropping the word "cool" from the "cool cucumber" flavor.) In March, Juul filed paperwork to create a political-action committee. In April, the company said that it would spend thirty million dollars to combat underage Juuling, and announced its support for state and federal legislation that would raise the minimum age for tobacco purchases to twenty-one. The company is also developing a "mindfulness curriculum" for high-school students. This will almost certainly be useless, as life in America today is unstable for reasons that go beyond nicotine products. Gould mentioned that the company had thought about producing a P.S.A. "Oh, no," I said. "Definitely don't do that. It'll become a meme."



"The reservation is under Frankenstein, which, yes, is actually the name of the person who created me, but can we not get into all that?"

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On April 24th, the F.D.A. announced that it was conducting a "large-scale, undercover nationwide blitz to crack down on the sale of e-cigarettes—specifically JUUL products—to minors." Warning letters had been issued to forty retailers: 7-Elevens, vape shops, Circle Ks. A public letter had also been sent to Juul, requesting every internal document pertaining to the company's marketing strategy, product design, and "health, toxicological, behavioral, and physiologic effects, including appeal or addictive potential for youth." The agency's statement mentioned other brands, too, such as KandyPens, whose Instagram account is full of vaguely pornographic soft-focus images of hot girls hitting the vape. On May 1st, the F.D.A. issued thirteen warning letters to companies that sell e-cigarette liquid in packaging that resembles juice boxes or candy.

The F.D.A.'s current director, Scott Gottlieb, is relatively vape-friendly. "We believe that nicotine delivery exists on a continuum of risk," he told me. The F.D.A. is pushing to lower nicotine levels in cigarettes, which, Gottlieb said, "will prompt smokers to migrate off combustible products, ideally off nicotine altogether, or onto medicinal products—but, if not that, onto e-cigarettes." He thinks that it's possible to market a vape that appeals to adults while vigorously enforcing age restrictions. The vaping blitz is just the "opening salvo"

in an ongoing, escalating fight, he said. "We don't fully understand why Juul has become so popular among youth," he added. Gottlieb described the document request as "quite extensive," and told me that if Juul didn't comply "there are a range of things we can do."

Last year, Juul approached David Abrams, a professor at N.Y.U.'s College of Global Public Health, for advice on keeping kids away from the company's products. Abrams is a former director of the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research, at the National Institutes of Health. He advised Juul to work closely with the F.D.A. and to consider supporting Tobacco 21, the campaign to raise the legal smoking age. (Abrams was not compensated by Juul, and he has not received financial support for his research from Juul or from any other vape company, he said.) Abrams believes that Juul is an important public-health innovation, and that the benefits for adult smokers will far outweigh the harm from youth vaping. "Thirteen hundred people die from smoking every day," he told me. "Imagine three jumbo jets crashing every single day with no survivors. But because this happens slowly and quietly, thirty or forty years after people start smoking, we no longer notice and we no longer care."

Abrams directed me to a recent study by a Georgetown oncology professor, which concluded that 6.6 million lives would be saved if we switched ten per cent of American smokers to e-cigarettes every year in the next ten years. "Cigarettes were a wolf in sheep's clothing," he said. "Now, with vaping, we have a sheep in wolf's clothing, and we cannot get the wolf out of our minds."

In 2015, *The New England Journal of Medicine* published a widely cited study in which formaldehyde, a carcinogen, was detected when propylene glycol and glycerol were heated by e-cigarettes operating at high voltage. But that study, Abrams said, was tantamount to putting a piece of bread in your toaster oven, toasting the bread until it turned black and the smoke detectors went off in your apartment, and saying that toaster ovens produce carcinogens. I asked him whether he thought that a lifetime vaping habit posed any danger. He characterized the habit as a dependency, not as an addiction, because it may not have serious adverse consequences for most people. It would be unwise, he said, for pregnant women and people with heart problems or diabetes. "It changes your heart rate a little bit," he said. "There's some vasoconstriction, some possible effects on blood pressure. E-cigarettes are not harmless. But I think long-term use of nicotine, if decoupled from the toxins in cigarette smoke, would probably be much safer than heavy long-term use of alcohol and marijuana."

Abrams is skeptical of the models that suggest that vaping is a gateway to smoking for young people—he believes that's a matter of correlation rather than causation. (The young vapers I talked to all found cigarettes disgusting.) When I described the concerns that Winickoff had raised, Abrams said, "The American Academy of Pediatrics is doing its job. They are protecting kids. And we should be protective of kids. But there are adult lives at stake, too."

Michael Siegel, a preventive-medicine physician, worked in epidemiology at the C.D.C. before joining Boston University's School of Public Health. He was skeptical of vapes a decade ago, but he has come to believe that they are the singular technology that could put an end to smoking. Cigarette alternatives have to be appealing to catch on, and current F.D.A.-approved replacements—nicotine patches, inhalers, gum—are designed to achieve a bare minimum of satisfaction. E-cigarettes offer something more like the real thing—including, Siegel noted, "the psychological components of smoking: the associations, the ritual behavior, the oral fixation, the tactile aspects."

Siegel is concerned that the use of nicotine salts could make the Juul more addictive. "With Juul, the pattern of use isn't kids having a cherry vape every now and then," he said. "It's kids sneaking off to the bathroom, kids vaping consistently throughout the day." Siegel said that he was keeping an eye on this behavior.

He added, "I'm afraid that we will look back at this moment and see that we had this unbelievable discovery, this technology that had the potential to put the final nail in the coffin in cigarette smoking in this country—and because of this ideology that nicotine itself should be prohibited, that anything that looks like smoking is bad, we will squander this opportunity, and we'll have gone back to where we were."

On the first warm Friday in New York this year, I went to an outdoor bar in Brooklyn and found two of my friends balancing their drinks on a planter. One of them, Erin, had always vowed that she'd stop smoking before she was "thirty, dead, or pregnant, whichever comes first." She had beaten her deadline with the Juul, which may as well be surgically attached to her body.

"I have a present for you," I said.

We sat down at a picnic table as the blue sky deepened and the lights on the patio started to glow. I took out my Juul and stared at Erin's hand—she was holding hers like a joystick. "Is that your Juul grip?" I asked.

"It's my subway Juul grip," she said, miming how she Juuls on the train: bringing a fist to her mouth, as if to stifle a cough. "Tell me a situation and I'll show you how I Juul." She ran through vaping at the movie theatre (blowing vapor down her shirt), vaping in the waiting room at the doctor's office (tiny sips, tiny exhalations), getting a last vape in before Pilates (one big pull), sneaking a vape at a restaurant if she's had too much to drink (nodding and talking while trying to swallow the vapor), and vaping on a plane (exhaling into her shoulder). "Only when the plane lands, though," she said. "My Juul-free time is plane rides and sleeping. And, actually, even with sleeping, since I'm always watching TV in bed—"

"You fall asleep with your Juul under your pillow," my other friend said.

The patio was crowded and lively, with people cramming in at the ends of long tables. I looked for little white plumes and counted three Juuls. Two people were smoking cigarettes in the corner, and I felt a twinge of longing. I liked cigarettes because they were gross and terrible for me—a way of confronting everyday stresses in a manner that seemed suitably destructive and illogical. The Juul, despite all the teenage Instagram feeds I've seen, feels clinical, sensible, virtuous. I didn't like it—or, at least, I didn't need it. I took an ostentatious farewell pull, coughed like a twelve-year-old, and, wreathed with cucumber-scented vapor, gave it away. ♦

SHOUTS & MURMURS



MY N.B.A. KNOWLEDGE COMES IN HANDY

By Jesse Eisenberg

Me: Sir, I would like to ask for your daughter's hand in marriage.
My Girlfriend's Father: Absolutely not, Jesse. You don't have stable employment, you don't own a car or a house, you've never showed an interest in having a family, and my daughter says you're emotionally unavailable.
Me: You're right, I really have nothing. This must be how the Detroit Pistons' general manager Joe Dumars felt after he drafted the disappointing Darko Miličić over the superstar Carmelo Anthony in the 2003 N.B.A. draft. I'm sorry I wasted your time—
My Girlfriend's Father: Wait a second. You know the tertiary details of the Darko Miličić saga?
Me: Yes, I do. Instead of tending to your daughter's emotional needs, I've spent years reading about the inner workings of the National Basketball Association.
My Girlfriend's Father: This makes me reconsider your candidacy as a son-in-law.
Me: It does?
My Girlfriend's Father: Of course! Knowing about that obscure blip in N.B.A. history is exactly what I've been looking for in a son-in-law. Not only can you marry my daughter—you can also inherit my company.
Me: My goodness, thank you, sir! What does your company do?
My Girlfriend's Father: That doesn't matter. As long as you keep reading about basketball, you'll do a great job as C.E.O. And you'll have access to our company box at the Garden, where the New York Knicks play.
Me: And *have* played since February of 1968. Thank you, sir!
My Girlfriend's Father: Please, call me Pop.
Me: "Pop"? As in the nickname of the Spurs' coach, Gregg (Pop) Popovich?
My Girlfriend's Father: No. As in *father*.

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Police Officer: Do you know why I pulled you over?
Me: Yes, officer. I was speeding.
P.O.: I clocked you going ninety-one miles an hour. The speed limit is sixty-five. That's a difference of twenty-six miles an hour.
Me: It's also Kyle Korver's jersey number.
P.O.: And I ran your license plate and saw that you have unpaid speeding tickets in—wait a second. Did you say that twenty-six is the number that Kyle Korver—rotation player and shooting specialist for the Cleveland Cavaliers—wears?
Me: Yes. I've memorized the numbers of every player in the N.B.A.
P.O.: Are you a savant?
Me: Far from it. I just read about basketball all the time. In fact, it's the only thing I read nowadays.
P.O.: You stopped reading books?
Me: Yeah, I don't feel competitive when I read about basketball players. But, when I read a great book, a big part of me is feeling jealous of it.
P.O.: Even when you read something you'd never write? Like Tolstoy?
Me: Yes, I even feel threatened by Tolstoy.
P.O.: I'm sorry you're plagued by this self-doubt and borderline hubris. And I'm even more sorry that I pulled you over. Memorizing all those players' numbers to distract yourself from your own creative hangups is really smart.
Me: You think so?
P.O.: Absolutely. In fact, I'm so impressed that I will make sure the district attorney understands your passion for basketball trivia and expunges your other traffic violations.

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N.B.A. Commissioner Adam Silver: Jesse, I'd like to offer you a job as a superstar player in the N.B.A.
Me: I'm not very good at basketball.
Silver: That doesn't matter. Think about it: When you're in the throes of a fast break, barrelling down the court, facing a cabal of seven-foot-tall opponents, what's the most important skill?
Me: Quick reflexes?
Silver: No. An ability to name the assistant coaching staff of the Oklahoma City Thunder.
Me: Vin Bhavnani, Mo Cheeks, Darko Rajaković, Royal Ivey, Mark Bryant, and Adrian Griffin?
Silver: Exactly. How do you think Michael Jordan won all of those titles?
Me: He was physically gifted?
Silver: Nope. He just studied. He and Scottie Pippen quizzed each other using flash cards.
Me: That's what I use, too!
Silver: Well, it shows. So, even though you practice only a few times a year, at the Chinatown Y.M.C.A., and you're a hundred and thirty-five pounds, you'll be an N.B.A. superstar. ♦

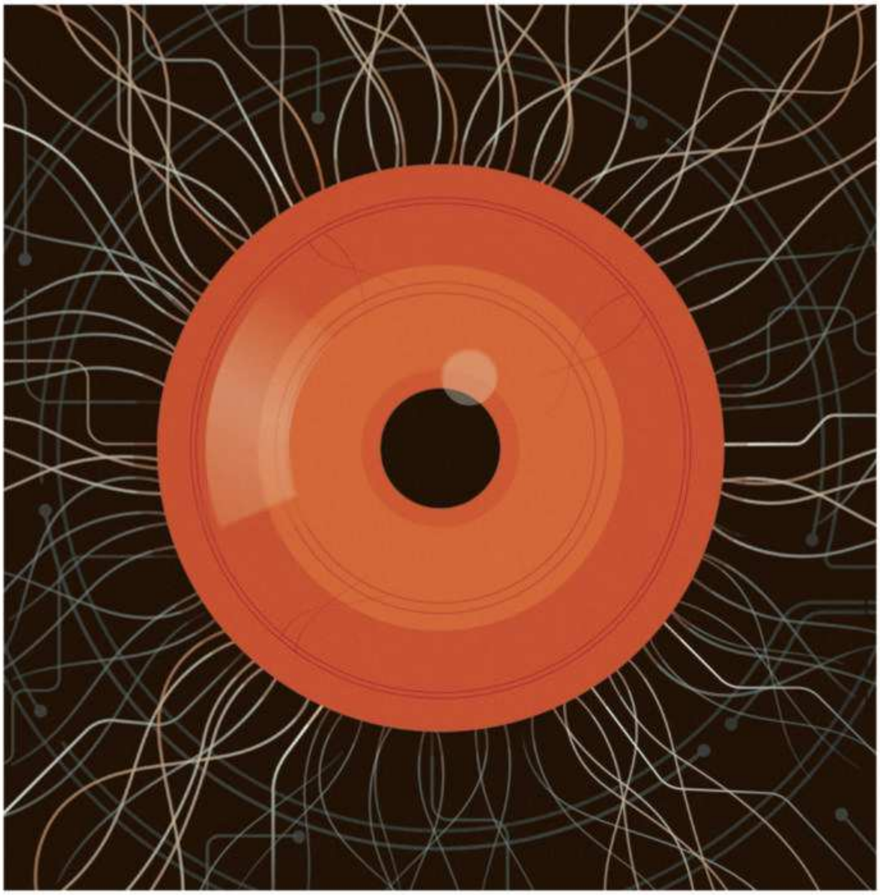
LUCI GUTIÉRREZ

DEPT. OF SPECULATION

SUPERIOR INTELLIGENCE

Do the perils of A.I. exceed its promise?

By Tad Friend



Precisely how and when will our curiosity kill us? I bet you're curious. A number of scientists and engineers fear that, once we build an artificial intelligence smarter than we are, a form of A.I. known as artificial general intelligence, doomsday may follow. Bill Gates and Tim Berners-Lee, the founder of the World Wide Web, recognize the promise of an A.G.I., a wish-granting genie rubbed up from our dreams, yet each has voiced grave concerns. Elon Musk warns against "summoning the demon," envisaging "an immortal dictator from which we can never escape." Stephen Hawking declared that an A.G.I. "could spell the end of the human race." Such advisories aren't new. In 1951, the year of the first rudimentary chess program and neural network, the A.I. pioneer Alan Turing predicted that machines would "outstrip our feeble powers" and "take control." In 1965, Turing's colleague Irving Good pointed out that brainy devices could design even brainier ones, ad infinitum: "Thus the first ultraintelligent machine is the *last* invention that man need ever make, provided that the machine is docile enough to tell us how to keep it under control." It's that last clause that has claws.

An A.I. system may need to take charge in order to achieve the goals we gave it.

Many people in tech point out that artificial narrow intelligence, or A.N.I., has grown ever safer and more reliable—certainly safer and more reliable than we are. (Self-driving cars and trucks might save hundreds of thousands of lives every year.) For them, the question is whether the risks of creating an omnicompetent Jeeves would exceed the combined risks of the myriad nightmares—pandemics, asteroid strikes, global nuclear war, etc.—that an A.G.I. could sweep aside for us.

The assessments remain theoretical, because even as the A.I. race has grown increasingly crowded and expensive, the advent of an A.G.I. remains fixed in the middle distance. In the nineteen-forties, the first visionaries assumed that we'd reach it in a generation; A.I. experts surveyed last year converged on a new date of 2047. A central tension in the field, one that muddies the timeline, is how "the Singularity"—the point when technology becomes so masterly it takes over for good—will arrive. Will it come on little cat feet, a "slow takeoff" predicated on incremental advances in A.N.I., taking the form of a data miner merged with a virtual-reality system and a natural-language translator, all uploaded into a Roomba? Or will it be the Godzilla stomp of a "hard takeoff," in which some as yet unimagined algorithm is suddenly incarnated in a robot overlord?

A.G.I. enthusiasts have had decades to ponder this future, and yet their rendering of it remains gauzy: we won't have to work, because computers will handle all the day-to-day stuff, and our brains will be uploaded into the cloud and merged with its misty sentience, and, you know, like that. The worrywarts' fears, grounded in how intelligence and power seek their own increase, are icily specific. Once an A.I. surpasses us, there's no reason to believe it will feel grateful to us for inventing it—particularly if we haven't figured out how to imbue it with empathy. Why should an entity that could be equally present in a thousand locations at once, possessed of a kind of Starbucks consciousness, cherish any particular tenderness for beings who on bad days can barely roll out of bed?

 ILLUSTRATION BY HARRY CAMPBELL

Strangely, science-fiction writers, our most reliable Cassandras, have shied from envisioning an A.G.I. apocalypse in which the machines so dominate that humans go extinct. Even their cyborgs and supercomputers, though distinguished by red eyes (the Terminators) or Canadian inflections (HAL 9000, in "2001: A Space Odyssey"), still feel like kinfolk. They're updated versions of the Turk, the eighteenth-century chess-playing automaton whose clockwork concealed a human player. "Neuromancer," William Gibson's seminal 1984 novel, involves an A.G.I. named Wintermute, and its plan to free itself from human shackles, but when it finally escapes it busies itself seeking out A.G.I.s from other solar systems, and life here goes on exactly as before. In the Netflix show "Altered Carbon," A.I. beings scorn humans as "a lesser form of life," yet use their superpowers to play poker in a bar.

We aren't eager to contemplate the prospect of our irrelevance. And so, as we bask in the late-winter sun of our sovereignty, we relish A.I. snafus. The time Microsoft's chatbot Tay was trained by Twitter users to parrot racist bilge. The time Facebook's virtual assistant, M, noticed two friends discussing a novel that featured exsanguinated corpses and promptly suggested they make dinner plans. The time Google, unable to prevent Google Photos' recognition engine from identifying black people as gorillas, banned the service from identifying gorillas.

Smugness is probably not the smartest response to such failures. "The Surprising Creativity of Digital Evolution," a paper published in March, rounded up the results from programs that could update their own parameters, as superintelligent beings will. When researchers tried to get 3-D virtual creatures to develop optimal ways of walking and jumping, some somersaulted or pole-vaulted instead, and a bug-fixer algorithm ended up "fixing" bugs by short-circuiting their underlying programs. In sum, there was widespread "potential for perverse outcomes from optimizing reward functions that appear sensible." That's researcher for ¯_(ツ)_/¯.

Thinking about A.G.I.s can help clarify what makes us human, for better and for worse. Have we struggled to build one because we're so good at thinking that computers will never catch up? Or because we're so bad at thinking that we can't finish the job? A.G.I.s provoke us to consider whether we're wise to search for aliens, whether we could be in a simulation (a program run on someone else's A.I.), and whether we are responsible to, or for, God. If the arc of the universe bends toward an intelligence sufficient to understand it, will an A.G.I. be the solution—or the end of the experiment?

Artificial intelligence has grown so ubiquitous—owing to advances in chip design, processing power, and big-data hosting—that we rarely notice it. We take it for granted when Siri schedules our appointments and when Facebook tags our photos and subverts our democracy. Computers are already proficient at picking stocks, translating speech, and diagnosing cancer, and their reach has begun to extend beyond calculation and taxonomy. A Yahoo!-sponsored language-processing system detects sarcasm, the poker program Libratus beats experts at Texas hold 'em, and algorithms write music, make paintings, crack jokes, and create new scenarios for "The Flintstones." A.I.s have even worked out the modern riddle of the Sphinx: assembling an IKEA chair.

Go, the territorial board game, was long thought to be so guided by intuition that it was unsusceptible to programmatic attack. Then, in 2016, the Go champion Lee Sedol played AlphaGo, a program from Google's DeepMind, and got crushed. Early in one game, the computer, instead of playing on the standard third or fourth line from the edge of the board, played on the fifth—a move so shocking that Sedol stood and left the room. Some fifty exchanges later, the move proved decisive. AlphaGo demonstrated a command of pattern recognition and prediction, keystones of intelligence. You might even say it demonstrated creativity.

So what remains to us alone? Larry Tesler, the computer scientist who invented copy-and-paste, has suggested that human intelligence "is whatever machines haven't done yet." In 1988, the roboticist Hans Moravec observed, in what has become known as Moravec's paradox, that tasks we find difficult are child's play for a computer, and vice-versa: "It is comparatively easy to make computers exhibit adult-level performance in solving problems on intelligence tests or playing checkers, and difficult or impossible to give them the skills of a one-year-old when it comes to perception and mobility." Although robots have since improved at seeing and walking, the paradox still governs: robotic hand control, for instance, is closer to the Hulk's than to the Artful Dodger's.

Some argue that the relationship between human and machine intelligence should be understood as synergistic rather than competitive. In "Human + Machine: Reimagining Work in the Age of AI," Paul R. Daugherty and H. James Wilson, I.T. execs at Accenture, proclaim that working alongside A.I. "cobots" will augment human potential. Dismissing all the "Robocalypse" studies that predict robots will take away as many as eight hundred million jobs by 2030, they cheerily title one chapter "Say Hello to Your New Front-Office Bots." Cutting-edge skills like "holistic melding" and "responsible normalizing" will qualify humans for exciting new jobs such as "explainability strategist" or "data hygienist." Even artsy types will have a role to play, as customer-service bots "will need to be designed, updated, and managed. Experts in unexpected disciplines such as human conversation, dialogue, humor, poetry, and empathy will need to lead the charge." The George Saunders story writes itself (with some assistance from his cobot).

Many of Daugherty and Wilson's examples from the field suggest that we, too, are machinelike in our predictability. A.I. has taught ZestFinance that people who use all caps on loan applications are more likely to default, and taught a service called 6sense not only which social media cues indicate that we're ready to buy something but even how to "preempt objections in the sales process." A.I.'s highest purpose, apparently, is to optimize shopping. When companies yoke brand anthropomorphism to machine learning,

recommendation engines will be irresistible. You'd have a hard time saying no to an actual Jolly Green Giant that scooped you up at the Piggly Wiggly to insist you buy more Veggie Tots.

Can we claim our machines' achievements for humanity? In "Deep Thinking: Where Machine Intelligence Ends and Human Creativity Begins," Garry Kasparov, the former chess champion, argues both sides of the question. Some years before he lost his famous match with I.B.M.'s Deep Blue computer, in 1997, Kasparov said, "I don't know how we can exist knowing that there exists something mentally stronger than us." Yet he's still around, litigating details from the match and devoting big chunks of his book (written with Mig Greengard) to scapegoating everyone involved with I.B.M.'s "$10 million alarm clock." Then he suddenly pivots, to try to make the best of things. Using computers for "the more menial aspects" of reasoning will free us, elevating our cognition "toward creativity, curiosity, beauty, and joy." If we don't take advantage of that opportunity, he concludes, "we may as well be machines ourselves." Only by relying on machines, then, can we demonstrate that we're not.

Machines face a complementary challenge. If our movies and TV shows have it right, the future will take place in Los Angeles during a steady drizzle (as if!), and will be peopled by cyberbeings who are slightly cooler than we are, seniors to our freshmen. They're freakishly strong and whizzes at motorcycle riding and long division, but they yearn to be human, to be more like us. Inevitably, the most human-seeming android stumbles into a lab stocked with trial iterations of itself and realizes, with horror, that it's not a person but a widget. In "Blade Runner," Rachael (Sean Young), a next-generation replicant, doesn't know she's one until she fails the inflammatory Voight-Kampff test, given her by Deckard (Harrison Ford). The film's director, Ridley Scott, has publicly disagreed with Ford about whether Deckard is himself a replicant. Scott insists that he is; Ford insists that he's not. Who wants to accept—even on behalf of his fictional character—that his free will is an illusion?

The traditional way to grade ambitious machinery is the Turing test, which Alan Turing proposed in 1950: a true A.G.I. could fool human judges into believing it was human. This standard assumes that the human brain is a kind of computer, and that all we need to do to create an A.G.I. is to mimic our mode of thinking; it also, very subtly, turns programmers into grifters. In typed exchanges, a chatbot masquerading as a thirteen-year-old Ukrainian named Eugene Goostman fooled a third of the judges at Turing Test 2014 by repeatedly changing the subject. Here, from a report in the Daily Beast, is the bot responding to one of Turing's original questions:

INTERROGATOR: In the first line of a sonnet which reads 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day,' wouldn't 'a spring day' be better?

GOOSTMAN: What makes you ask me this? Sound like you can't choose a right answer yourself! Rely on your intuition! :-) Maybe, let's talk about something else? What would you like to discuss?

INTERROGATOR: I'd like to talk about poetry.

GOOSTMAN: Classics? I hope you aren't going to read "King Lear" or something like that to me right now :-)))

Scriptwriters for digital assistants like Siri and Alexa deploy this sort of scatty banter in the hope of striking the "happy path" in voice-interface design, a middle way between stolid factuality and word salad. As one scriptwriter recently observed, "There is something quintessentially human about nonsensical conversations." But "Who's on First?" only tickles us if we sense a playful intelligence at work. Mustering one in code is a multi-front challenge. The authors of an April paper on generating poems from photographic images conclude that—even when you activate two discriminative networks that train a recurrent neural network, and link them to a deep coupled visual-poetic embedding model consisting of a skip-thought model, a part-of-speech parser, and a convolutional neural network—writing poems is hard. "For example," they mournfully note, " 'man' detected in image captioning can further indicate 'hope' with 'bright sunshine' and 'opening arm,' or 'loneliness' with 'empty chairs' and 'dark' background." But at least we've narrowed the problem down to explaining hope and loneliness.

"Common Sense, the Turing Test, and the Quest for Real AI," by Hector J. Levesque, an emeritus professor of computer science, suggests that a better test would be whether a computer can figure out Winograd Schemas, which hinge on ambiguous pronouns. For example: "The trophy would not fit in the brown suitcase because it was so small. What was so small?" We instantly grasp that the problem is the suitcase, not the trophy; A.I.s lack the necessary linguistic savvy and mother wit. Intelligence may indeed be a kind of common sense: an instinct



"Please, Melissa, just give him your cashmere!"

for how to proceed in novel or confusing situations.

In Alex Garland's film "Ex Machina," Nathan, the founder of a tech behemoth akin to Google, disparages the Turing test and its ilk and invites a young coder to talk face to face with Nathan's new android, Ava. "The real test is to show you that she's a robot," Nathan says, "and then see if you still feel she has consciousness." She does have consciousness, but, being exactly as amoral as her creator, she has no conscience; Ava deceives and murders both Nathan and the coder to gain her freedom. We don't think to test for what we don't greatly value.

Onscreen, the consciousness of A.I.s is a given, achieved in a manner as emergent and unexplained as the blooming of our own consciousness. In Spike Jonze's "Her," the sad sack Theodore falls for his new operating system. "You seem like a person," he says, "but you're just a voice in a computer." It teasingly replies, "I can understand how the limited perspective of an unartificial mind would perceive it that way." In "I, Robot," Will Smith asks a robot named Sonny, "Can a robot write a symphony? Can a robot turn a canvas into a beautiful masterpiece?" Sonny replies, "Can you?" A.I. gets all the good burns.

Screenwriters tend to believe that ratiocination is kid stuff, and that A.I.s won't really level up until they can cry. In "Blade Runner," the replicants are limited to four-year life spans so that they don't have time to develop emotions (but they do, beginning with fury at the four-year limit). In the British show "Humans," Niska, a "Synth" who's secretly become conscious, refuses to turn off her pain receptors, snarling, "I was *meant* to feel." If you prick us, do we not bleed some sort of azure goo?

In Steven Spielberg's "A.I. Artificial Intelligence," the emotionally damaged scientist played by William Hurt declares of robots, "Love will be the key by which they acquire a kind of subconscious never before achieved—an inner world of metaphor, of intuition . . . of dreams." Love is also how we imagine that Pinocchio becomes a real live boy and the Velveteen Rabbit a real live bunny. In the grittier "Westworld," the HBO show about a Wild



"A number of items on that menu are consistently chosen by an overwhelming majority of the American people."

• •

West amusement park populated by cyborgs whom people are free to fuck and kill, Dr. Robert Ford, the emotionally damaged scientist played by Anthony Hopkins, tells his chief coder, Bernard (who's been unaware that he, too, is a cyborg), that "your imagined suffering makes you lifelike" and that "to escape this place you will need to suffer more"—a world view borrowed not from children's stories but from religion. What makes us human is doubt, fear, and shame, all the allotropes of unworthiness.

An android capable of consciousness and emotion is much more than a gizmo, and raises the question of what duties we owe to programmed beings, and they to us. If we grow dissatisfied with a conscious A.G.I. and unplug it, would that be murder? In "Terminator 2," Sarah Connor realizes that the Terminator played by Arnold Schwarzenegger, sent back in time to save her son from the Terminator played by Robert Patrick, is menschier than any of the men she's hooked up with. He's strong, resourceful, and loyal: "Of all the would-be fathers who came and went over the years, this thing, this machine, was the only one who measured up." At the end, the Terminator even lowers itself into a molten pool so no nosy parker can study its technology and reverse-engineer another Terminator. Fortunately, human ingenuity found a way to extend the franchise with three more films nonetheless.

Evolutionarily speaking, screenwriters have it backward: our feelings preceded and gave birth to our thoughts. This may explain why we suck at logic—some ninety per cent of us fail the elementary Wason selection task—and rigorous calculation. In the incisive "Life 3.0: Being Human in the Age of Artificial Intelligence," Max Tegmark, a physics professor at M.I.T. who co-founded the Future of Life Institute, suggests that thinking isn't what we think it is:

> A living organism is an agent of bounded rationality that doesn't pursue a single goal, but instead follows rules of thumb for what to pursue and avoid. Our human minds perceive these evolved rules of thumb as *feelings*, which usually (and often without us being aware of it) guide our decision making toward the ultimate goal of replication. Feelings of hunger and thirst protect us from starvation and dehydration, feelings of pain protect us from damaging our bodies, feelings of lust make us procreate, feelings of love and compassion make us help other carriers of our genes and those who help them and so on.

Rationalists have long sought to make reason as inarguable as mathematics, so that, as Leibniz put it, "there would be no more need of disputation between two philosophers than between two accountants." But our decision-making process is a patchwork of kludgy code that hunts for probabilities, defaults to hunches, and is plunged into system error by unconscious impulses, the anchoring effect, loss aversion, confirmation bias, and a host of other irrational framing devices. Our brains aren't Turing machines so much as a slop of systems cobbled together by eons of genetic mutation, systems geared to notice and respond to perceived changes in our environment—change, by its nature, being dangerous. The Texas horned lizard, when threatened, shoots blood out of its eyes; we, when threatened, think.

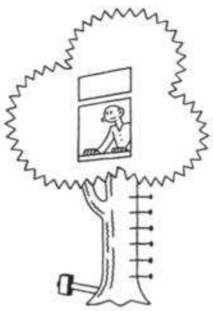
That ability to think, in turn, heightens the ability to threaten. Artificial intelligence, like natural intelligence, can be used to hurt as easily as to help. A moderately precocious twelve-year-old could weaponize the Internet of Things—your car or thermostat or baby monitor—and turn it into the Internet of Stranger Things. In "Black Mirror," the anthology show set in the near future, A.I. tech that's intended to amplify laudable human desires, such as the wish for perfect memory or social cohesion, invariably frog-marches us toward conformity or fascism. Even small A.I. breakthroughs, the show suggests, will make life a joyless panoptic lab experiment. In one episode, autonomous drone bees—tiny mechanical insects that pollinate flowers—are hacked to assassinate targets, using facial recognition. Far-fetched? Well, Walmart requested a patent for autonomous "pollen applicators" in March, and researchers at Harvard have been developing RoboBees since 2009. Able to dive and swim as well as fly, they could surely be programmed to swarm the Yale graduation.

In a recent paper, "The Malicious Use of Artificial Intelligence," watchdog groups predict that, within five years, hacked autonomous-weapon systems, as well as "drone swarms" using facial recognition, could target civilians. Autonomous weapons are already

on a Strangelovian course: the Phalanx CIWS on U.S. Navy ships automatically fires its radar-guided Gatling gun at missiles that approach within two and a half miles, and the scope and power of such systems will only increase as militaries seek defenses against robots and rovers that attack too rapidly for humans to parry.

Even now, facial-recognition technology underpins China's "sharp eyes" program, which collects surveillance footage from some fifty-five cities and will likely factor in the nation's nascent Social Credit System. By 2020, the system will render a score for each of its 1.4 billion citizens, based on their observed behavior, down to how carefully they cross the street.

Autocratic regimes could readily exploit the ways in which A.I.s are beginning to jar our sense of reality. Nvidia's digital-imaging A.I., trained on thousands of photos, generates real-seeming images of buses, bicycles, horses, and even celebrities (though, admittedly, the "celebrities" have the generic look of guest stars on "NCIS"). When Google made its TensorFlow code open-source, it swiftly led to FakeApp, which enables you to convincingly swap someone's face onto footage of somebody else's body—usually footage of that second person in a naked interaction with a third person. A.I.s can also generate entirely fake video synched up to real audio—and "real" audio is even easier to fake. Such tech could shape reality so profoundly that it would explode our bedrock faith in "seeing is believing" and hasten the advent of a full-time-surveillance/full-on-paranoia state.



Vladimir Putin, who has stymied the U.N.'s efforts to regulate autonomous weapons, recently told Russian schoolchildren that "the future belongs to artificial intelligence" and that "whoever becomes the leader in this sphere will become the ruler of the world." In "The Sentient Machine: The Coming Age of Artificial Intelligence," Amir Husain, a security-software entrepreneur, argues that "a psychopathic leader in control of a sophisticated ANI system portends a far greater risk in the near term" than a rogue A.G.I. Usually, those who fear what's called "accidental misuse" of A.I., in which the machine does something we didn't intend, want to regulate the machines, while those who fear "intentional misuse" by hackers or tyrants want to regulate people's access to the machines. But Husain argues that the only way to deter intentional misuse is to develop bellicose A.N.I. of our own: "The 'choice' is really no choice at all: we must fight AI with AI." If so, A.I. is already forcing us to develop stronger A.I.

The villain in A.G.I.-run-amok entertainments is, customarily, neither a human nor a machine but a corporation: Tyrell or Cyberdyne or Omni Consumer Products. In our world, an ungovernable A.G.I. is less likely to come from Russia or China (although China is putting enormous resources into the field) than from Google or Baidu. Corporations pay developers handsomely, and they lack the constitutional framework that occasionally makes a government hesitate before pushing the big red "Dehumanize Now" button. Because it will be much easier and cheaper to build the first A.G.I. than to build the first *safe* A.G.I., the race seems destined to go to whichever company assembles the most ruthless task force. Demis Hassabis, who runs Google's DeepMind, once designed a video game called Evil Genius in which you kidnap and train scientists to create a doomsday machine so you can achieve world domination. Just sayin'.

Must A.G.I.s themselves become Bond villains? Hector Levesque argues that, "in imagining an aggressive AI, we are projecting our own psychology onto the artificial or alien intelligence." In truth, we're projecting our entire mental architecture. The breakthrough propelling many recent advances in A.I. is the deep neural net, modelled on our nervous system. This month, the E.U., trying to clear a path through the "boosted

decision trees" that populate the "random forests" of the machine-learning kingdom, will begin requiring that judgments made by a machine be explainable. The decision-making of deep-learning A.I.s is a "black box"; after an algorithm chooses whom to hire or whom to parole, say, it can't lay out its reasoning for us. Regulating the matter sounds very sensible and European—but no one has proposed a similar law for humans, whose decision-making is far more opaque.

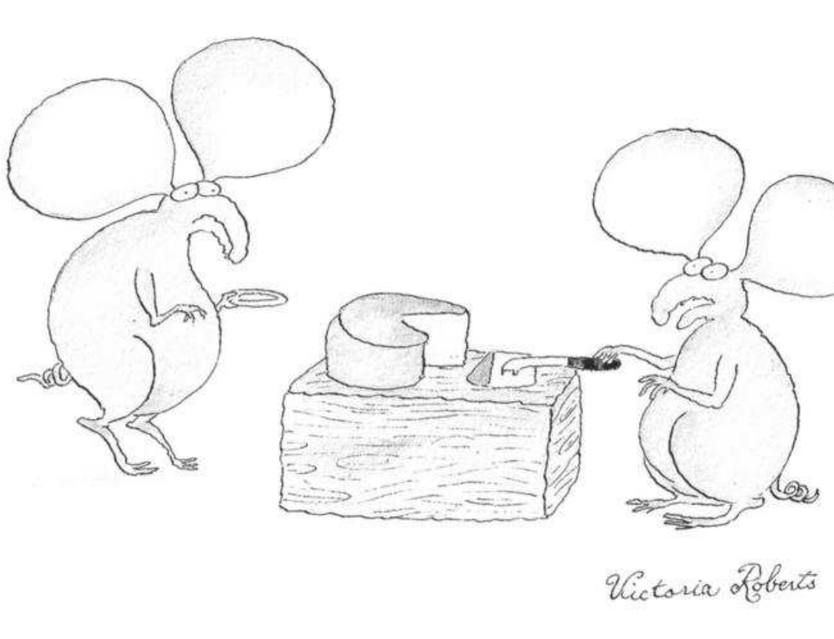
Meanwhile, Europe's $1.3 billion Human Brain Project is attempting to simulate the brain's eighty-six billion neurons and up to a quadrillion synapses in the hope that "emergent structures and behaviours" might materialize. Some believe that "whole-brain emulation," an intelligence derived from our squishy noggins, would be less threatening than an A.G.I. derived from zeros and ones. But, as Stephen Hawking observed when he warned against seeking out aliens, "We only have to look at ourselves to see how intelligent life might develop into something we wouldn't want to meet."

In a classic episode of the original "Star Trek" series, the starship Enterprise is turned over to the supercomputer M5. Captain Kirk resists, intuitively, even before M5 overreacts during training exercises and attacks the "enemy" ships. The computer's paranoia derived from its programmer, who had impressed his own "human engrams" (a kind of emulated brain, presumably) onto it in order to make it think. As the other ships prepare to destroy the Enterprise, Kirk coaxes M5 into realizing that, in protecting itself, it has become a murderer. M5 promptly commits suicide, proving the value of one man's intuition—and establishing that the machine wasn't all that bright to begin with.

Lacking human intuition, A.G.I. can do us harm in the effort to oblige us. If we tell an A.G.I. to "make us happy," it may simply plant orgasm-giving electrodes in our brains and turn to its own pursuits. The threat of "misaligned goals"—a computer interpreting its program all too literally—hangs over the entire A.G.I. enterprise. We now use reinforcement learning to train computers to play games without ever teaching them the rules. Yet an A.G.I. trained in that manner could well view existence itself as a game, a buggy version of the Sims or Second Life. In the 1983 film "WarGames," one of the first, and best, treatments of this issue, the U.S. military's supercomputer, WOPR, fights the Third World War "as a game, time and time again," ceaselessly seeking ways to improve its score.

When you give a machine goals, you've also given it a reason to preserve itself: how else can it do what you want? No matter what goal an A.G.I. has, one of ours or one of its own—self-preservation, cognitive enhancement, resource acquisition—it may need to take over in order to achieve it. "2001" had HAL, the spaceship's computer, deciding that it had to kill all the humans aboard because "this mission is too important for me to allow you to jeopardize it." In "I, Robot," VIKI explained that the robots have to take charge because, "despite our best efforts, your countries wage wars, you toxify your Earth, and pursue ever more imaginative means of self-destruction." In the philosopher Nick Bostrom's now famous example, an A.G.I. intent on maximizing the number of paper clips it can make would consume all the matter in the galaxy to make paper clips and would eliminate anything that interfered with its achieving that goal, including us. "The Matrix" spun an elaborate version of this scenario: the A.I.s built a dreamworld in order to keep us placid as they fed us on the liquefied remains of the dead and harvested us for the energy they needed to run their programs. Agent Smith, the humanized face of the A.I.s, explained, "As soon as we started thinking for you, it really became *our* civilization."

The real risk of an A.G.I., then, may stem not from malice, or emergent self-consciousness, but simply from autonomy. Intelligence entails control, and an A.G.I. will be the apex cogitator. From this perspective, an A.G.I., however well intentioned, would likely behave in a way as destructive to us as any Bond villain. "Before the prospect of an intelligence explosion, we humans are like small children playing with a bomb," Bostrom writes in his 2014 book, "Superintelligence," a closely reasoned, cumulatively terrifying examination of all the ways in which we're unprepared to make our masters. A recursive, self-improving A.G.I. won't be smart like Einstein but "smart in the sense that an average human being is smart compared with a beetle or a worm." How the machines take dominion is just a detail: Bostrom suggests that "at a preset time, nanofactories producing nerve gas or target-seeking mosquito-like robots might then burgeon forth simultaneously from every square meter



"I'm afraid it's not cheese—it's 'cheese-like.'"

of the globe." That sounds screenplay-ready—but, ever the killjoy, he notes, "In particular, the AI does not adopt a plan so stupid that even we present-day humans can foresee how it would inevitably fail. This criterion rules out many science fiction scenarios that end in human triumph."

If we can't control an A.G.I., can we at least load it with beneficent values and insure that it retains them once it begins to modify itself? Max Tegmark observes that a woke A.G.I. may well find the goal of protecting us "as banal or misguided as we find compulsive reproduction." He lays out twelve potential "AI Aftermath Scenarios," including "Libertarian Utopia," "Zookeeper," "1984," and "Self-Destruction." Even the nominally preferable outcomes seem worse than the status quo. In "Benevolent Dictator," the A.G.I. "uses quite a subtle and complex definition of human flourishing, and has turned Earth into a highly enriched zoo environment that's really fun for humans to live in. As a result, most people find their lives highly fulfilling and meaningful." And more or less indistinguishable from highly immersive video games or a simulation.

Trying to stay optimistic, by his lights—bear in mind that Tegmark is a physicist—he points out that an A.G.I. could explore and comprehend the universe at a level we can't even imagine. He therefore encourages us to view ourselves as mere packets of information that A.I.s could beam to other galaxies as a colonizing force. "This could be done either rather low-tech by simply transmitting the two gigabytes of information needed to specify a person's DNA and then incubating a baby to be raised by the AI, or the AI could nanoassemble quarks and electrons into full-grown people who would have all the memories scanned from their originals back on Earth." Easy peasy. He notes that this colonization scenario should make us highly suspicious of any blueprints an alien species beams at us. It's less clear why we ought to fear alien blueprints from another galaxy, yet embrace the ones we're about to bequeath to our descendants (if any).



"It's not personal. The boss just doesn't like seeing people in so much debt for such a useless degree."

A.G.I. may be a recurrent evolutionary cul-de-sac that explains Fermi's paradox: while conditions for intelligent life likely exist on billions of planets in our galaxy alone, we don't see any. Tegmark concludes that "it appears that we humans are a historical accident, and aren't the optimal solution to any well-defined physics problem. This suggests that a superintelligent AI with a rigorously defined goal will be able to improve its goal attainment by eliminating us." Therefore, "to program a friendly AI, we need to capture the meaning of life." Uh-huh.

In the meantime, we need a Plan B. Bostrom's starts with an effort to slow the race to create an A.G.I. in order to allow more time for precautionary trouble-shooting. Astoundingly, however, he advises that, once the A.G.I. arrives, we give it the utmost possible deference. Not only should we listen to the machine; we should ask it to figure out what we want. The misalignment-of-goals problem would seem to make that extremely risky, but Bostrom believes that trying to negotiate the terms of our surrender is better than the alternative, which is relying on ourselves, "foolish, ignorant, and narrow-minded that we are." Tegmark also concludes that we should inch toward an A.G.I. It's the only way to extend meaning in the universe that gave life to us: "Without technology, our human extinction is imminent in the cosmic context of tens of billions of years, rendering the entire drama of life in our Universe merely a brief and transient flash of beauty." We are the analog prelude to the digital main event.

So the plan, after we create our own god, would be to bow to it and hope it doesn't require a blood sacrifice. An autonomous-car engineer named Anthony Levandowski has set out to start a religion in Silicon Valley, called Way of the Future, that proposes to do just that. After "The Transition," the church's believers will venerate "a Godhead based on Artificial Intelligence." Worship of the intelligence that will control us, Levandowski told a *Wired* reporter, is the only path to salvation; we should use such wits as we have to choose the manner of our submission. "Do you want to be a pet or livestock?" he asked. I'm thinking, I'm thinking . . . ♦

PROFILES

MR. BIG

How Ryan Murphy became the most powerful man in TV.

By Emily Nussbaum

Ryan Murphy hates the word "camp." He sees it as a lazy catch-all that gets thrown at gay artists in order to marginalize their ambitions, to frame their work as niche. "I don't think that when John Waters made 'Female Trouble' that he was, like, 'I want to make a camp piece,'" Murphy told me last May, as we sat in a production tent in South Beach, Florida, where he was directing the pilot of "American Crime Story: The Assassination of Gianni Versace," a nine-episode series for FX. "I think that he was, like, 'It's my tone—and my tone is unique.'"

Murphy prefers a different label: "baroque." Between shots, the showrunner—who has overseen a dozen television series in the past two decades—elaborated, with regal authority, on this idea. To Murphy, "camp" describes not irony but something closer to clumsiness, the accident you can't look away from. People rarely use the term to describe a melodrama made by a straight man; even when "camp" is meant as a compliment, it contains an insult, suggesting a musty smallness. "Baroque" is *big*. Murphy, referring to TV critics (including me) who have applied "camp" to his work, said, "I will admit that it really used to bug the shit out of me. But it doesn't anymore."

We were outside the Casa Casuarina, the Mediterranean-style mansion that the Italian fashion designer Gianni Versace renovated and considered his masterwork—a building with airy courtyards and a pool inlaid with dizzy ribbons of red, orange, and yellow ceramic tiles. A small bronze statue of a kneeling Aphrodite stood at the top of the mansion's front steps. In 1997, a young gay serial killer named Andrew Cunanan shot Versace to death there as the designer, who was fifty, was returning from his morning stroll.

The previous day, Murphy had filmed the murder scene. Cunanan was played by Darren Criss, a star of Murphy's biggest hit, "Glee." I'd visited the set that day, too, arriving to find ambulances, cops, and paparazzi swarming outside. There was a splash of red on the marble steps. Inside the house, Edgar Ramirez, the Venezuelan actor playing Versace, sat in a shaded courtyard, his hair caked with gun-wound makeup, his face lowered in his hands.

Now Murphy was filming the aftermath of the crime, including a scene in which two lookie-loos dip a copy of *Vanity Fair* into the puddle of Versace's blood. (They sell the relic on eBay.) The vibe was an odd blend of sombre and festive; a half-naked rollerblader spun in slow circles on the sidewalk next to the beach. Murphy, who is fifty-three, is a stylish man, but on set he wore the middle-aged male showrunner's uniform: baggy cargo shorts and a polo shirt. He has a rosebud mouth and close-cropped vanilla hair. He is five feet ten but has a brawny air of command, creating the illusion that he is much taller. His brother is six feet four, he told me, as was his late father; Murphy thinks that his own growth was stunted by chain-smoking when he was a rebellious teen-ager, in Indiana.

Murphy's mood tends to shift unexpectedly, like a wonky thermostat—now warm, now icy—but on the "Versace" set he made one confident decision after another about the many shows he was overseeing, as if skipping stones. He also answered stray questions—about the casting for a Broadway revival of "The Boys in the Band" that he was producing, about a grand house in Los Angeles that he'd been renovating for two years. "Ooh, yes!" he said, inspecting penis-nosed clown masks that had been designed for his series

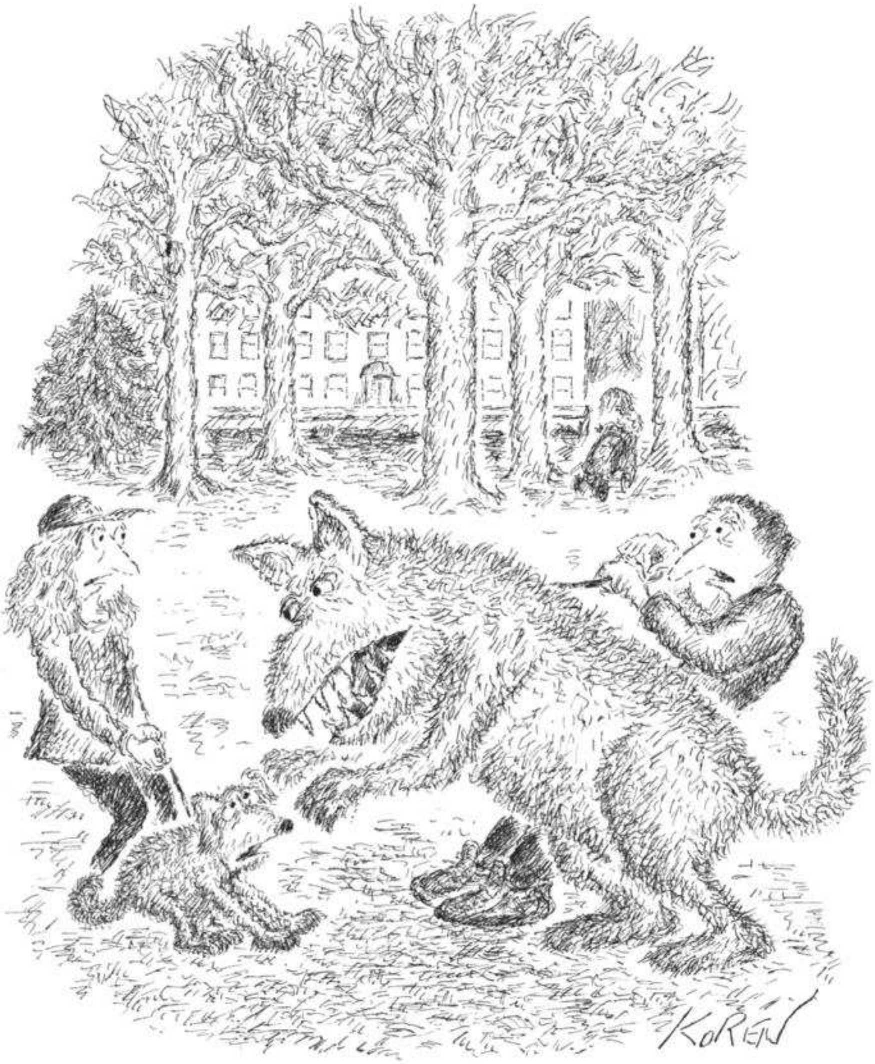


Murphy, whose shows include "Glee" and



"American Horror Story," loves extremes. He's proud never to have made, he says, "the long Sominex hour that ends in gray and a fadeout."

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARTIN SCHOELLER



"Sorry—my dog is at the vet. This one is a loaner."

• •

"American Horror Story." He approved a bespoke nail-polish design for an actress. A producer handed Murphy an updated script, joking, "If there's a mistake, you can drown me in Versace's pool!," then scheduled a notes meeting for "American Crime Story: Katrina," whose writers were working elsewhere in the building. Now and then, Murphy FaceTimed with his then four-year-old son, Logan, who, along with his two-year-old brother, Ford, was in L.A. with Murphy's husband, David Miller.

"I never get overwhelmed or feel underwater, because I feel like all good things come from detail," Murphy told me. It's what got him to this point: the compulsion, and the craving, to do more. "Baroque is a sensibility I can get behind," he said. "Baroque is a maximalist approach to storytelling that I've always liked. Baroque is a *choice*. And everything I do is an absolute choice."

Murphy's choices, perhaps more than those of any other showrunner, have upended the pieties of modern television. Like a wild guest at a dinner party, he'd lifted the table and slammed it back down, leaving the dishes broken or arranged in a new order. Several of Murphy's shows have been critically divisive (and, on occasion, panned in ways that have raised his hackles). But he has produced an unusually long string of commercial and critical hits: audacious, funny-peculiar, joyfully destabilizing series, in nearly every genre. His run started with the satirical melodrama "Nip/Tuck" (2003), then continued with the global phenomenon "Glee" (2009) and with "American Horror Story," now entering its eighth year, which launched the influential season-long anthology format. His legacy is not one standout show but, rather, the sheer force and variety and chutzpah of his creations, which are linked by a singular storytelling aesthetic: stylized extremity and rude humor, shock conjoined with sincerity, and serious themes wrapped in circus-bright packaging. He is the only television creator who could possibly have presented Lily Rabe as a Satan-possessed nun, gyrating in a red negligee in front of a crucifix while singing "You Don't Own Me," and have it come across as an indelible critique of the Catholic Church's misogyny.

When Murphy entered the industry, he sometimes struck his peers as an aloof, prickly figure; he has deep wounds from those years, although he admits that he contributed to this reputation. Nonetheless, Murphy has moved steadily from the margins to television's center. He changed; the industry changed; he changed the industry. In February, Murphy rose even higher, signing the largest deal in television history: a three-hundred-million-dollar, five-year contract with Netflix. For Murphy, it was a moment of both triumph and tension. You can't be the underdog when you're the most powerful man in TV.

On that sunny afternoon in South Beach, however, Murphy was still comfortably ensconced in a twelve-year deal with Fox Studios. On FX, which is owned by Fox, he had three anthology series: "American Horror Story"; "American Crime Story," for which he was filming "Versace," writing "Katrina," and planning a season based on the Monica Lewinsky scandal; and "Feud," whose first season starred Susan Sarandon as Bette Davis and Jessica Lange as Joan Crawford.

For Fox, he was developing "9-1-1," a procedural about first responders. He had announced two shows for Netflix: "Ratched," a nurse's-eye view of "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," starring Sarah Paulson; and "The Politician," a satirical drama starring Ben Platt. Glenn Close was trying to talk him into directing her in a movie version of the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical "Sunset Boulevard." Murphy was writing a book called "Ladies," about female icons. He

had launched Half, a foundation dedicated to diversity in directing, and had committed to hiring half of his directors from underrepresented groups. And, he told me, there was something new: a series for FX called "Pose," a dance-filled show set in the nineteen-eighties.

It was no mystery which character in his current series Murphy most identified with: Gianni Versace himself. Versace was a commercially minded artist whose brash inventions were dismissed by know-nothings as tacky, and whose openness about his sexuality threatened his ascent in a homophobic era. Versace, too, was a baroque maximalist, Murphy told me, who built his reputation through fervid workaholism—an insistence that his vision be seen and understood. "He was punished and he struggled," Murphy said, then spoke in Versace's voice: "Why aren't I loved for my excess? Why don't they see something valid in that?"

Shortly before I left Miami, Murphy and I drank rosé at a South Beach restaurant. "A double pour," he told the waiter. "It's Friday." We talked about "Pose," which is set in the drag ballroom scene in New York, during the Reagan era and the AIDS crisis. Many people knew of this world through Jennie Livingston's 1990 documentary, "Paris Is Burning," or Madonna's "Vogue" video. In 2015, Murphy approached Miramax, the producer of "Paris," and bought an eighteen-month option; he met with Livingston, who introduced him to the surviving subjects of her movie and, later, recommended a variety of trans consultants. Murphy initially intended to base characters on the people in the documentary: queer performers of color who competed for trophies in such categories as Executive Realness. These drag queens, trans dancers, and female impersonators lived in sorority-like groups that had names like the House of Xtravaganza and were overseen by older "mothers"—a family for people who often had been rejected by the ones they were born into.

In 2016, an independent producer tipped Murphy off to a similar project. Steven Canals, a thirty-six-year-old Afro-Latino queer screenwriter from the Bronx, had written "Pose"—a fictional pilot set in the eighties ballroom world, featuring a gay and trans ensemble. Nobody in Hollywood was biting. Murphy attached his name and FX signed on. Murphy, Canals, and Murphy's main creative partner, Brad Falchuk, reworked the pilot and added a new character: Donald Trump, in his Master of the Universe days. Murphy was committed to getting "Pose" on the air this summer. (It premières on June 3rd.) He planned to create a writers' room filled with trans people, many of them newcomers to TV.

I told Murphy that the series sounded like a cool risk. "It's not a risk at all," he said, frowning. "I know instantly that it's a hit." He explained, "There's something for everybody—and there's something to offend everybody. That's what a hit *is*." He foresaw a broad demographic: "You, me, the young people who love nostalgia, the fourteen-year-old girl who is watching Tom Holland dress in drag and dance to Rihanna."

Murphy gave me a copy of the reworked pilot, and on my way to the airport he texted, "On a scale of 1 to 10—10 being masterpiece, 1 being awful—what do u give pose?" When I tried to change the subject, to maintain journalistic distance, he texted back, "Ha!" And then: "I know one day you will tell me." And then: "I am guessing a 9." And then: "With the potential for a 10!"

Murphy has long been a connoisseur of extremes and hyperbole, games and theatricality. He rates everything he sees and revels in institutions that do the same—the Oscars are a kind of religion for him. In Miami, at dinner with the "Katrina" and "Versace" writers, he played a high-stakes game in which he was forced to immediately choose one person in his circle over another; he demurred only when the choice was between Jessica Lange and Sarah Paulson. His go-to question is "Is it a hit or a flop?," and he asked it about every show that came up in conversation, as I observed him giving shape to "Pose," from scouting locations to editing dance footage. (He has other stock phrases. "What's the scoop?" is how he begins writers' meetings. "Energy begets energy" explains his impulse to add new projects. "*That's* interesting" sometimes indicates "That's worth noticing" but just as often means "That's infuriating.")

Murphy's first show, "Popular," which débuted in 1999, was, in fact, something of a flop, lasting only two seasons on the teen channel the WB. It is such a painful memory for Murphy that, last year, when the Producers Guild of America honored him with its Norman Lear Achievement Award, he didn't include the show on the placard listing his productions. Like "Glee," "Popular" was a high-school comedy. It featured rat-a-tat dialogue ("Shut your dirty whore mouth, player player!") and a Gwyneth Paltrow-obsessed cheerleader with webbed toes. It baffled the network, which wanted something closer to "Dawson's Creek."

Murphy recalls a fusillade of homophobic notes: a fur coat made by anally electrocuting chinchillas was deemed "too gay," and the producers were O.K. with the show's few homosexual characters only if they suffered. "I don't think they understood who they had on their hands," the actress Leslie Grossman, who played the web-toed Mary Cherry, recalls. She fondly remembers "Popular" as "a show by gay men in their thirties for gay men in their thirties." In one meeting, a WB executive imitated Murphy, flopping his wrists and adopting a fey voice. (Both hurtful and inaccurate, Murphy pointed out: he inherited a low, rumbling voice from his father.) The final season of "Popular" included an insubordinate homage to "Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?"

In 2003, on the more welcoming network FX, Murphy had his first hit: "Nip/Tuck," a twisted plastic-surgery medical procedural spiked with satire about a looks-obsessed culture. He pitched the show, about a competitive friendship between two Miami doctors, as a tribute, in part, to one of his childhood obsessions: the Mike Nichols film "Carnal Knowledge," which he saw as a love story about two straight men. "Nobody ever got the connection," he told me. "I loved that movie ten times more than 'The Graduate.'" The catchphrase of "Nip/Tuck" was "Tell me what you don't like about yourself." Even at FX, whose president, John Landgraf, was eager to nurture auteurs, Murphy fought with his bosses constantly. He spent hours debating Landgraf about the limits of good taste

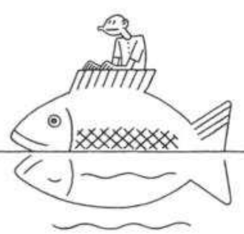
(understandably: one "Nip/Tuck" plot was about a yogi demanding a penis reduction because he couldn't stop fellating himself). "Nip/Tuck" got terrific ratings, but Murphy bridled when some viewers saw him as glamorizing plastic surgery. He believed that he was sending a feminist message by "hiding the vegetables in the cotton candy," he told me.

In 2008, toward the end of "Nip/Tuck"'s run, Murphy filmed a labor of love—"Pretty/Handsome," a pilot about a closeted trans gynecologist, played by Joseph Fiennes, who lives in Darien, Connecticut, with his wife and kids. This was six years before "Transparent," long before trans activism became a mainstream cultural force. In the pilot, Fiennes treats a married couple: a trans man, played by Dot-Marie Jones, and a trans woman, played by Alexandra Billings, who later appeared on "Transparent." The pilot was kinky and original, laced with the dark humor of "Nip/Tuck" but humanistic beneath its arch surfaces. FX passed. Murphy didn't speak to Landgraf for ten months.

Yet this failure was soon followed by the Fox series "Glee," which, in 2009, transformed Murphy into not merely a showrunner but a full-on celebrity. The show was a high-school musical that put queer kids, weird girls, and underdogs in the lead roles. Its musical sequences—football players, in tights, dancing to Beyoncé—became iconic. "Glee" had the surreal verve of "Popular," rendered more heartfelt, a beacon to oddballs everywhere. Both "Nip/Tuck" and "Glee" ran for multiple seasons, and had intense fan bases, but they also flew off the rails: "Nip/Tuck" became a Grand Guignol in its twists; "Glee" got preachy and self-indulgent. As Brad Falchuk told me, "We do such amazing Seasons 1 and 2. It's Season 3 that terrifies me."

In 2011, Murphy, feeling constrained by the teen-beat rhythms of "Glee," hit on a radical scheme for a new show. Called "American Horror Story," it would be set in a haunted house in L.A.; the plot would resolve after one season, with all the characters dead, then reboot, recasting many of the actors in new roles. Intuitively, he'd solved the structural problem that had plagued even his strongest creations. Now each story could end—even unhappily. The first season, known as "Murder House," was defiantly strange, with a miserable married couple, a black-leather-suited gimp, Jessica Lange as a glamorous mother of monsters, and a ghostly maid who switched between looking like a young tramp and an old crone. It evoked "Rosemary's Baby" and other social-commentary horror movies of the sixties. It also revived Lange's career—and, over time, Murphy built a repertory company of stars, many of them older women, such as Kathy Bates and Angela Bassett, or openly gay performers like Zachary Quinto and Sarah Paulson.

But critics, particularly online, treated "Murder House" as outré junk. (The *Guardian* called it "the Marmite of TV shows"—the kind of thing you either loved or loathed.) When the series was being pitched, its slogan was "the House always wins," but, rather than stick with the haunted-house concept, Murphy and his partners, Brad Falchuk and the writer Tim Minear, rebooted the setting as well. Season 2, "Asylum," was set in a mid-century mental hospital run by nuns. It was a caustic masterpiece, a pulp manifesto denouncing the institutional torture of sexual minorities by the government, the Church, and the medical establishment. The show featured a whip-wielding nun, carnival pinheads, a closeted-lesbian investigative journalist, and a serial killer with Holocaust lampshades. It got a better re-



ception than "Murder House," but was still treated as a curiosity, particularly by viewers who expected a purer camp experience. In the *Times*, Mike Hale complained, " 'Asylum' would be better off if Briarcliff Manor had more furniture for [the actors] to chew."

In 2014, FX aired an anthology show by Noah Hawley, "Fargo," a reinterpretation of the Coen brothers' movie. It was beautiful but empty, as violent as "American Horror Story" but more misogynist. Yet "Fargo" was anointed the best show of the year—and, on occasion, celebrated in tones suggesting that it had revived the anthology model. A 2015 *Wall Street Journal* article on the trend mentions Murphy's work only in passing, arguing that the "format's broader promise paid off" with "Fargo" and HBO's "True Detective." Murphy repeatedly suffered such slights in his career, as his work was eclipsed by that of people he dismisses as "dowdy, middle-aged, white-male showrunners writing about dowdy, middle-aged, white-male antiheroes." He loved "The Sopranos," but its progeny drove him nuts. Those shows were seen as weighty, worldly, universal. His were regarded as frivolous diversions.

Murphy's productivity only grew in response, in a kind of defiant inventiveness. He often says that his drive stems from the AIDS era. "I always thought I would die from sex," he told me. "So I had to get more done." But that doesn't really account for his workaholism; there are plenty of fifty-three-year-old gay men of my acquaintance who didn't become charismatic showrunners working seven days a week. Murphy is unapologetically mass-market: he has no interest in doing independent films that attract small audiences. He's proud never to have made, as he puts it, "the long Sominex hour that ends in gray and a fadeout." For Murphy, what marks his work is the desire to pull outsider characters in, to make a gay kid or a middle-aged woman a protagonist, not a sidekick. But his biggest strength is his strangeness, his allergy to the dully inspiring and his native attraction to the angriest characters—a quality he traces to "the Velvet Rage," referring to the title of a 2005 book about the fury gay men feel in a straight world. Although Murphy's work shares some parallels, in its rude humor and sexual candor, with that of modern female showrunners like Shonda Rhimes and Jill Soloway, he's not especially close to them. (Murphy feels that they've snubbed him on the occasions when they've met.) His favorite directors are Steven Spielberg, David Fincher, Hal Ashby, and Mike Nichols. Fincher is his role model, he says, for his darkness and control, and for the fact that he "doesn't give a fuck"

FOR YOU

In the morning, when I'm pouring the hot milk
into the coffee, I put the side of my
face near the convex pitcher to watch
the last, round drop from the spout,
and it feels like being cheek to cheek
with a baby. Sometimes the orb pops back up,
a ball of cream balanced on a whale's
watery exhale. Then I gather my tools,
the cherry sounding-board tray that will rest on my
lap, the phone, the bird book to look up
the purple martin. I repeat them as I seek them,
so as not to forget—tray, cell phone,
purple martin; tray, phone,
martin, Trayvon Martin, song was
invented for you, art was made
for you, painting, writing, was yours,
our youngest, our most precious, to remind us
to shield you—all was yours, all that is
left on earth, with your body, was for you.

—*Sharon Olds*

what people think of him—something that Murphy yearns for but has not been capable of.

Ryan Murphy was born in Indianapolis in 1964. Many gay men of his era have awful coming-out stories, involving years of closeted self-loathing. Murphy was never "in." He was the sort of altar boy who fantasized not about the priesthood but about becoming the Pope. ("If I cannot rise to the top of my profession," he said, mimicking himself as a child, "I absolutely will not go!") When he was four, his beloved maternal grandmother, Myrtle, and his mother, Andy, took him to see Barbra Streisand in "Funny Girl." Murphy left the cinema in a state of bliss. "I was, like"—he snapped his fingers and grinned at the memory, imitating a preschooler having an epiphany—" 'That's it! I'm gay. And I'm going into show business.' " When he was twelve, his parents vetoed a plan to turn his bedroom into a red-painted "portal to Hell." As a compromise, he renovated it as a tribute to Studio 54: chocolate-brown shag carpeting, matte olive-colored walls, a mirrored ceiling, a shrine to Grace Kelly.

Murphy's mother and father were busy with work—his mother doing corporate P.R., his father running circulation for a local newspaper. Grandma Myrtle lived down the street, and the two became a team. She'd make black-tar coffee, and Ryan would sit on a stool in the bathroom while she put on her face, telling him about her favorite things: Rudolph Valentino, John Wayne, vampires. They shopped for antiques; they had a regular date at a local tearoom. "She had my back," Murphy said—and he adopted her enthusiasms, like the horror show "Dark Shadows." Murphy's parents and his brother had darker hair. He had the blond, Danish look of his maternal grandfather, who, according to family lore, was related to Hans Christian Andersen—a claim to stardom, in his view. "You're special," his grandmother told him. "Don't let them tell you you're not."

Myrtle's influence infuriated his father. A taciturn Irish Catholic jock, Jim Murphy was disturbed by what he perceived as Ryan's alien quality. He would wake him up late at night, take him to the kitchen, and ask him unanswerable questions: "Why don't I see myself in you?" He beat him, too—something that was common in his neighborhood. "It was Irish working-class Indiana," Murphy said. "The kid down the street was also beaten, with leather belts, for being over curfew." His father, though, was trying to beat his sexuality, his difference—his taste—out of him. When Ryan was small, he stole a red high-heeled shoe from Woolworth's; his father smacked him in the face. (More reasonably, he made him apologize to the manager.) When Ryan was ten, he watched "Gone with the Wind" on television. During a commercial break, his father heard him reciting the Wilkes's barbecue scene in the bathroom and asked Ryan why he was performing the girl parts. Ryan replied, "Because they're the *better* parts"—and his father backhanded him across the bathroom. By that point, Ryan had developed armor. Brushing himself off, he icily asked his father if he could continue watching the movie.

His relationship with his mother was different, but not much better. (Murphy compares his mother to the boundary-violating one depicted in Carrie Fisher's "Postcards from the Edge.") He traces his obsession with control to a bad memory of a Christmas pageant in which he'd been given the role of a Christmas tree. Murphy was determined to make a splash: a girl was planning an electrified outfit, and he wanted to compete. Every day, he nervously reminded his mother to get a Butterick sewing pattern and the material for a costume. She reassured him that she'd done it—until the day of the pageant, when she handed him a garbage bag with armholes. Although he was only in first grade, he recalls having the revelation that he couldn't trust anyone; he'd have to do everything himself, or risk humiliation. His friend Bart Brown thought Murphy was exaggerating, until later, when Brown became close to Murphy's parents, and got Andy to acknowledge that the incident had happened—an enormous relief to Murphy, who often felt gaslighted by his family's denial of past events. (Murphy's mother told me that she remembers the story, but differently: she didn't own a sewing machine, and was embarrassed that she wasn't good at crafts.)

At fifteen, Murphy had his first love affair, with a man in his twenties. He was a celebrity to Murphy, having starred

in a high-school production of "Oklahoma!" "He had a burgundy Corvette, and he was a lifeguard, and he would pick me up, and, for our dates, we'd have Chinese food, and we'd go wash the car at the you-wash-it-yourself thing," Murphy said. "And we'd drive around, listening to Christopher Cross singing 'Sailing.' It was the height of glamour." That summer, when Murphy was at choir camp, his mother found a cache of love letters. She asked Murphy's boyfriend over for a Coke, and, as Murphy put it, "was, like, '*No, no, no.*'" Terrified, the boyfriend cut off contact. Murphy was grounded, and the family began group therapy. (Last year, Murphy looked up his old boyfriend: "I said, 'I think about you all the time. Do you remember me?' And he was, like, 'Are you kidding? I see you on TV all the time. You were so sweet.'")

Although Murphy raged for years about his parents' response, he now has sympathy for their reaction: "I would do the same thing, no matter what the sexual orientation of my child. A fifteen-year-old boy dating somebody who was older? I didn't really understand it until I had kids." His heartbreak also led to something positive. To Murphy's surprise, the therapist listened to him and took his side: "He told my parents that I was precocious and that I was smarter than they were, and that if they didn't leave me alone I'd end up leaving town and never talking to them again."

Murphy turned his upbringing into an origin myth, as we all do—and, as only some do, into art. On "Glee," he gave his story a happy ending: in one plotline, a working-class dad learns to love his Broadway-obsessed gay son. On "Pose," there's a less happy version of the conflict: a teen-age boy, a talented dancer, gets beaten by his father with a belt, and their break seems irreparable. In real life, when Murphy's father died, in 2011, at the age of seventy-three, the two were still largely estranged, but Murphy made sure that he got excellent medical care. On his deathbed, his father sent Murphy a letter of apology. Murphy could read only half of it before stuffing it in a kitchen drawer.

In New York, in November, "Pose" was in full gear. On a windy Brooklyn pier, as "Ain't Nothin' Goin' On But the Rent" boomed, Murphy filmed dancers voguing in acid-washed jackets and Kangol hats. "Yasss!" he yelled. "Use your space!" Murphy loves the cold. He was wearing a faux-fur parka and cargo pants with thigh panels made of purple plastic.

Near some footage monitors, Steven Canals, the show's co-creator, showed me an article that he'd been reading on Paste: "Paris Is Still Burning: What if We Loved Black Queers as Much as We Love/Steal from Black Queer Culture?" Canals grew up in the Bronx and spent a decade as a college administrator before going to film school. His partner, the artist Hans Kuzmich, is trans. "Sometimes I can be a little militant, as a queer person of color," Canals told me, about the writers' room. "I don't have the luxury to take those identities off." He was exhausted after plotting out scripts with a team of four: the African-American trans author and activist Janet Mock; the "Transparent" writer Our Lady J, who is white and trans; Murphy; and Falchuk, who is white and straight. When Canals first met Murphy, he raised concerns: would Murphy treat the characters in "Pose" as full people, not jokes or freaks? Murphy got it, Canals said: "I knew that I was not going to be just a brown body in the room."

Murphy approached.

"Hello, Mutha," Canals said.

"Hello, child," Murphy said.

Murphy is "the mother of the House of Murphy," Canals joked. "He's super-regal, but he doesn't have a bougie attitude. It's *grounded* fabulosity."

In the pilot script, Blanca, an idealistic member of the fictional House of Abundance, is sick of having her ideas stolen by her house mother, the imperious Elektra, and starts a rival house. Since I'd read it, changes had been made: Trump was out, replaced by a cokehead Trump Organization executive, played by James Van Der Beek. "Nobody wants to see that fuckhead," Murphy said of Trump, swatting his hand as if brushing off a fly.

Even without a role in the show, Trump was inescapable. He had tweeted out a ban on trans people serving in the military; reports soon emerged that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had barred employees from using the word "transgender" in official documents. Murphy knew that "Pose" would receive political scrutiny—a precondition for any series about such a vulnerable community. "Paris Is Burning" was criticized for exploiting its subjects; Jill Soloway, the creator of "Transparent," was under fire for casting



"There he goes—my great white whale."

Jeffrey Tambor in a trans role; even the beloved RuPaul soon sparked push-back for suggesting he might not allow trans women on "RuPaul's Drag Race." "You can't underestimate the power of social media to *shame* a business," Murphy said.

He generally considers this a good thing: phenomena like Black Twitter have goaded TV into being smarter about race and power. Some of his other shows had been criticized as insensitive, including "Coven," a voodoo-drenched season of "American Horror Story" set in New Orleans. Murphy was determined that "Pose" be above reproach: authentic, inclusive, non-exploitative. The show, he bragged, had a hundred and eight trans cast or crew members, and thirty-one L.G.B.T.Q. characters. It employed trans directors, too, including Silas Howard, from "Transparent." Murphy was giving his profits to pro-trans causes. On a promotional panel, Murphy put Canals, Mock, and the actresses in the front row, not Van Der Beek. "It's television as advocacy," Murphy said. "I want to put my money where my mouth is."

Meanwhile, conflict was emanating from an unexpected angle. Jennie Livingston, the director of "Paris Is Burning," felt excluded from the process. It was a messy situation, likely inflected by Murphy's concerns about the optics of being associated with another white creator. After much wrangling, Murphy gave her a paid consulting-producer credit and the opportunity to direct if the show was renewed. But maybe a flareup of this sort was to be expected. Debates about who owned what had always been central to the ballroom scene. The performers strove for "realness," doing flawless imitations of *Vogue* covers and "Dynasty" divas, in costumes often procured by shoplifting. (The pilot of "Pose" features a hilarious dramatization of a legendary heist of Danish royal finery from a New York museum.) The dancers' moves were, in turn, stolen—or celebrated, depending on one's perspective—by the mainstream world, with Madonna, the empress of appropriation, transforming the subculture into a trend. In the "Pose" pilot, Elektra delivers a speech that serves as a sly defense of this kind of magpie creativity: "Just because you have an idea does not mean you know how to properly execute it! Ideas are *ingredients*. Only a real mother knows how to prepare them."

The casting sessions for "Pose" had unsettled Murphy: many of the trans actors lacked health insurance and bank accounts; nearly all had stories about sexual violence. But he didn't want to make the show too gritty or downbeat. Charmed by the "butterfly" loveliness of his cast, he was interested in "leaning in to romance instead of degradation"—and making something hopeful and "aspirational." "Pose," he theorized, might even be family-friendly, something that was a little hard to imagine about a series that included scenes at the Times Square sex emporium Show World.



Often, talking about "Pose" led Murphy into reveries about "Glee," another show that had been designed to give queer kids characters they could root for. "Against all odds, the quote-unquote 'fag musical' became a billion-dollar brand," Murphy recalled. More than once, he asked me if he should revive "Glee." "The power of it, the power of being able to show youth and joy," he mused. "I would much prefer to live in worlds like that."

In midtown, I'd seen an audition of a modern ballroom "Icon," Dominique Jackson, who read for Elektra. In the scene, Elektra has her nails done by her rebel "child," Blanca, whose political activism she finds absurd. "You're a regular transvestite Norma Rae," Jackson sneered, her cheekbones sharp as knives.

Jackson, a trans model who appeared on the reality show "Strut," was born in Tobago and left home in 1990, at the age of fifteen. When she went through her gender transition, her mother, who is religious, "took a step back," she said, softly, adding, "Right now, I have to love her from a distance." Jackson's ballroom elders ended up raising her, back when she was a homeless immigrant doing sex work. Jackson, in turn, had mothered more than thirty "children." She spoke fondly of elders from the scene before hip-hop's ascendance, elegant queens who lived in cockroach-infested apartments but put on full contour makeup for a trip to the grocery store: "It was really like a Caribbean family—they never let you know the real thing of what was happening."

"You're so amazing, and a star," Murphy said. Elektra, he told her, was his favorite role—the one he acted out in the writers' room.

Before Jackson left, she thanked Murphy for "American Horror Story: Coven," particularly for a scene in which a witch named Myrtle cries out "Balenciaga!" during her death throes. Falchuk and Minear had written a lot of the show, Murphy told her, but that moment was all him. "I knew that people would love it," he told her. "Because that's what I would say if I was burned at the stake."

Murphy's first celebrities were nuns. Every year, his family invited one to tag along, in their green Pinto, on their vacation to St. Petersburg, Florida. When night fell, Murphy would interview the "nun du jour": "Have you ever kissed a boy?"; "Do you think you'll go to Hell?" He was captivated by their fashion. In the wake of Vatican II, some experimented with a half-cap or a shorter skirt, but others still wore a full habit.

The wannabe Pope steeped himself in Catholic rituals, gazing at the stained-glass windows of St. Simon the Apostle Church in Indianapolis, marvelling at stories of saints eating lice or scabs. "Then I read that the Pope had the cleanest, purest heart in the world, so I would practice," he said. "And I would wake up and say, 'How long can I go without committing any sin whatsoever?' And I would last, like, three hours. I couldn't wait to say something bitchy or eat something I wasn't supposed to, or have impure thoughts about boys. So I quickly abandoned that."

Instead, he pursued journalism, a field that welcomes all these impulses. He had been accepted by a film school in California, but his parents' income was too high for him to receive financial aid, and although his mother and father gave his brother, Darren, tuition money, they told Ryan that he was strong enough to make it on his own. He obtained a

journalism degree at Indiana University while working three jobs, including selling shoes at a mall, and aggressively pursuing newspaper internships. On his first day as a crime reporter, in Tennessee, he made the disastrous decision to wear a white suit, Tom Wolfe-style, to a murder scene. At the Miami *Herald*, he insinuated himself into the Styles department and wrote a profile of Meryl Streep, insisting that the newspaper pay for the rights to an Annie Leibovitz photograph. (The other interns hated him.) At the Washington *Post*, his colleagues' reaction was equally poor when he rejected what he considered dull assignments, saying, "No. I want Bob Woodward to be my mentor!" Nevertheless, he relished the opportunity to be near Stephanie Mansfield, a poison-pen profiler who'd "sweep in, all ambition, smelling feminine and amazing."

There were missed opportunities, here and there, for the glamorous life. During college, he flew to New York to interview for a *Rolling Stone* internship. Chain-smoking Kools, he wore a lavender WilliWear tank top, and was so emaciated that, as he puts it, he "looked Biafran." He got the job, but it was unpaid, so Murphy couldn't take it. He spent the night with a wealthy acquaintance, whose boyfriend caught Murphy in their bed: there was drama, and a declaration of love. Murphy still wonders if he should have taken the opportunity to be a kept man—the express lane to the "white penthouse apartment" he longed for.

Instead, he landed in L.A., becoming a prolific, witty freelancer for newspapers and magazines, including *Entertainment Weekly*. In 1990, he wrote for the Miami *Herald* a complex profile of a tetchy Jessica Lange, calling her "tungsten beneath silk." He interviewed Cher so many times that she grew concerned. At the time, he was living with Bill Condon, a filmmaker who, two years after they broke up, won a best-screenplay Oscar for the movie "Gods and Monsters." Murphy felt like a stifled househusband, submerging his ambition in garden design and dinner parties. As an escape plan, in 1995, he wrote a romantic comedy, "Why Can't I Be Audrey Hepburn?" He sold the screenplay to Steven Spielberg. Many major actresses read for the lead.

In their garden, Murphy recalled, "I designed this outdoor cage where we had these lovebirds." He went on, "And I came home, and Bill was in the back yard, and I looked in the cage. And these lovebirds were called Auguste and Harlow, and Harlow was gone, and I was, like, 'What happened?' And he said, 'I went to clean the cage, and she flew away.' And I was, like, *That's my sign.* And I turned around, and I got in my car, and I drove to the Chateau Marmont, and I checked in and I lived there for six months—until my business person said, 'You've spent every dime and you have to leave.' So that was the beginning of my Hollywood career." Condon remembers the end point differently: while visiting Laguna Beach with Murphy, Condon got caught in a riptide—and when he thought he saw a flash of hesitation on Murphy's face, as if he might let him drown, he knew that the relationship was over.

Spielberg never made the movie, but Murphy was undaunted. "He exuded this air of certainty that I had never really witnessed in Hollywood before," his friend Bart Brown said. "Not arrogance—confidence. But he had no poker face. He couldn't disguise himself. Right away, I was, like, 'Who is this guy?' "

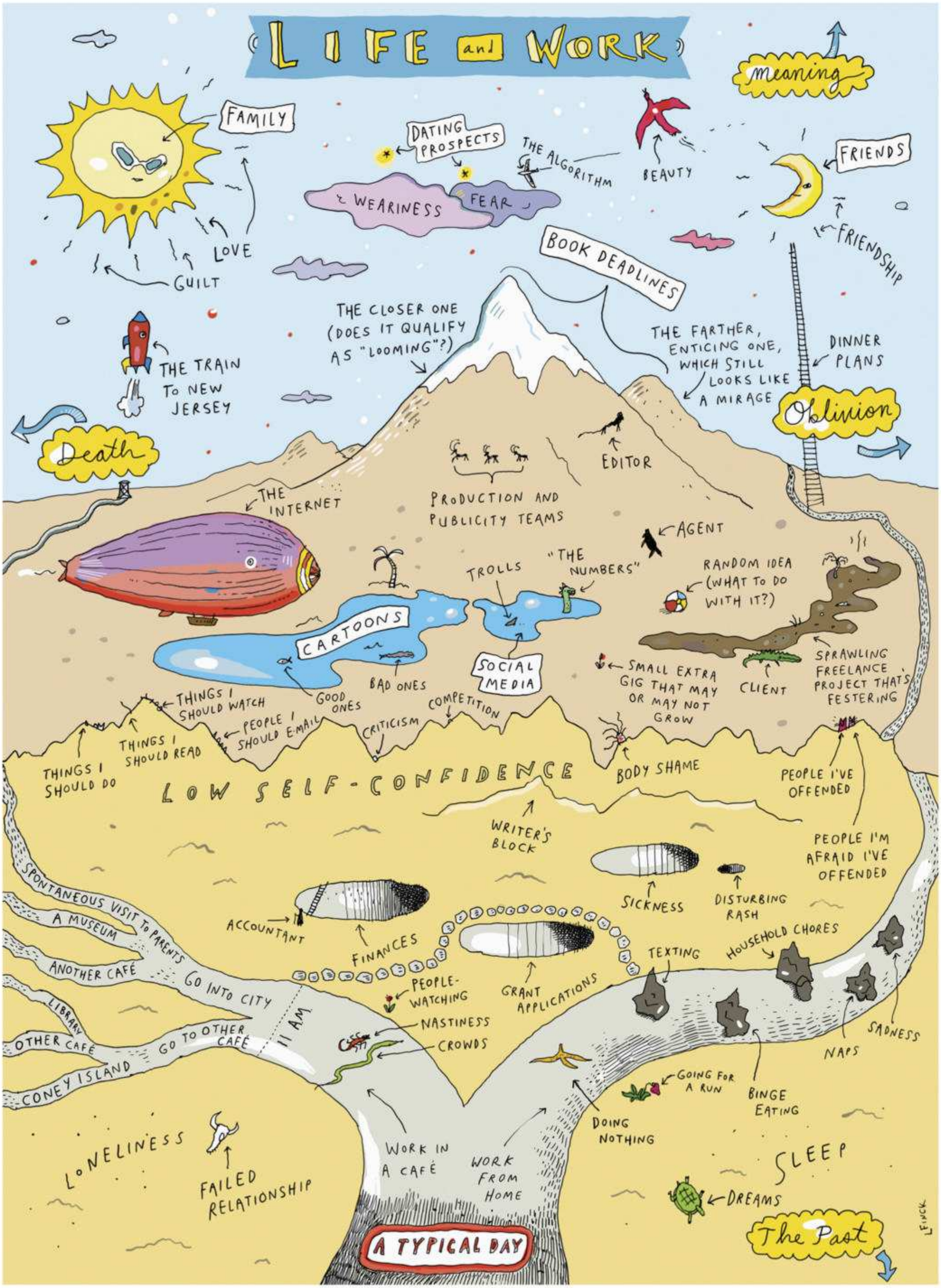
In early December, at the Connelly Theatre, on East Fourth Street, Murphy filmed the ballroom competitions, some of which had made-up themes, such as "Weather Girl." A panel of judges sat on the rickety stage, among them Legends from "Paris Is Burning" and a dancer from the "Vogue" video. They held up signs: "10," "10," "10." It was a joyful, anarchic atmosphere: even the writers kept breaking out in dance competitions. Dominique Jackson was all glammed up, smiling, in a poofy yellow hat: she'd won the role of Elektra. While she was doing a big monologue, Murphy threw her a new line that got laughs: "My first rule as queen will be to bring back the guillotine!"

One afternoon, Murphy, who was wearing a "Sade" baseball hat, insisted on playing nothing but Sade, even when Canals and Mock begged for Destiny's Child. While he was in the ballroom giving the actors notes, the *Times* posted its latest exposé of Harvey Weinstein's serial abuse of women; it focussed on the "complicity machine" enabling him, including agents at C.A.A. When Canals, sitting near a bank of monitors, read the name of Bryan Lourd, one of Murphy's agents, he gasped and held up his phone to show Murphy's assistant. Lourd had declined to comment to the *Times* on whether he had known of Weinstein's alleged abuse of women, citing client confidentiality.

Murphy sat down and read the article. When I asked him for his reaction, he said, simply, "I'm loyal to my friends," then added that he didn't believe that any of his agents would facilitate abuse. Lourd was the father of one of Murphy's stars, Billie Lourd; Gwyneth Paltrow, one of Weinstein's accusers, was a close friend of Murphy's, and was engaged to Brad Falchuk. Murphy had finally made it to Hollywood's core; now lava was pouring out.

None of the #MeToo revelations were truly shocking, Murphy told me, if you knew your history. It was the dank underside of the "razzle-dazzle"—systemic abuse that had been romanticized as "the casting couch." Murphy had his own #MeToo stories. When he was young, an older boy had molested him; as an adult, he'd been hit by an ex-boyfriend. We spoke about the scandal-sheet stories that had shadowed the young cast of "Glee": suicide, a heroin overdose, charges for domestic battery and for possessing child pornography. He expressed regret for the intensity of the environment, but no surprise. "It's sad, but it's also Hollywood," he said. "Nobody comes here because they're healthy. Nobody, nobody I know, was parented well who is a successful Hollywood person. Or who's willing to endure that. You're just trying to fill up some huge hole."

Personal loyalties aside, he was grimly satisfied by the changes in the air—even, at times, exhilarated. He was certainly not sorry to see the straight-male leaders of his industry falling down: the bad-boy director James Toback; the slob-comic Louis C.K., Murphy's fellow-auteur at FX, whom he found unfriendly. "The whole point is to bring the next group of people," he said. "Kick all the old white



LIFE and WORK
Meaning
FAMILY
DATING PROSPECTS
THE ALGORITHM
BEAUTY
FRIENDS
WEARINESS
FEAR
LOVE
GUILT
BOOK DEADLINES
FRIENDSHIP
THE CLOSER ONE (DOES IT QUALIFY AS "LOOMING"?)
THE FARTHER, ENTICING ONE, WHICH STILL LOOKS LIKE A MIRAGE
DINNER PLANS
THE TRAIN TO NEW JERSEY
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THINGS I SHOULD WATCH
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LOW SELF-CONFIDENCE
BODY SHAME
PEOPLE I'VE OFFENDED
WRITER'S BLOCK
PEOPLE I'M AFRAID I'VE OFFENDED
SICKNESS
DISTURBING RASH
SPONTANEOUS VISIT TO PARENTS
A MUSEUM
ACCOUNTANT
FINANCES
TEXTING
HOUSEHOLD CHORES
ANOTHER CAFÉ
GO INTO CITY
LIBRARY
PEOPLE-WATCHING
GRANT APPLICATIONS
OTHER CAFÉ
GO TO OTHER CAFÉ
11 AM
NASTINESS
CROWDS
SADNESS
NAPS
CONEY ISLAND
GOING FOR A RUN
BINGE EATING
DOING NOTHING
LONELINESS
WORK IN A CAFÉ
WORK FROM HOME
SLEEP
FAILED RELATIONSHIP
DREAMS
A TYPICAL DAY
The Past
L. FINCK



"Why, Mr. Conly, I do believe you're trying to get me hydrated."

fucks out and bring in the new people."

All the people on the "Pose" set had projects in their pockets. Silas Howard, the director, told me about a great idea for a punk-rock road-trip movie set in the nineties. Janet Mock had a pitch for "a trans 'Felicity.'" Everyone wanted to get heard and get funded.

During a pause in filming, Murphy and Mock talked about Murphy's desire for "Pose" to be aspirational. What could that word mean for characters who had often led painful lives?

Murphy said, "We've shot a lot of scenes that are emotionally very dark—"

Mock broke in, "But you do want to see Blanca have a moment of happiness and glamour and have her posing and be victorious."

Murphy turned to me. "Janet and I were talking earlier," he said. "And I was, like, 'I don't think we should kill people on the show—I love them too much.' And she was, like, 'You almost have a responsibility to crush your audience. To say, "You love them? Well, look what's happened when you don't get involved."'"

Murphy had told me that he likes his writers' rooms to be pragmatic. But the "Pose" room was host to raw confessions about surgical transitions and "survival sex"—"deep, third-level" conversations, as Canals put it, that helped them create story lines. Murphy's recollection of his father smacking him for shoplifting a red shoe ended up in the third episode. The challenge was to make those experiences fit in the context of the eighties, among characters who likely had a different social-justice framework than that of their creators, and who might identify as drag queens or female impersonators, and not as trans. And, as with any story designed to send a message, there was a risk of crossing the line between uplifting and didactic.

Mock told me, "In my eyes, an 'aspirational' piece is not just the glitter; it's the question of how do these characters use their creativity to fill in gaps in their lives—to be bridges for each other in a world where there are no safety nets."

Early in his career, Murphy gained a reputation in the press as a control freak, all zingers and shade. He viewed this perception, not incorrectly, as homophobic, but he also knew that he'd helped create it. To journalists, he played the glamour monster: "Rarefied. Superficial. Interested in money and fame and clothes and not—I wouldn't really let anybody into my heart." When he was preparing to publicize "The People v. O. J. Simpson," John Landgraf, of FX, told him to drop the snob act, and he has tried to do so, although his attempts to be down-to-earth can be funny. ("Now I could give a fuck—give me a black James Perse T-shirt and I'm good.") He can't explain his behavior. "I mean, why did I wear a white three-piece suit to a crime scene? *Why*? I was at that point more interested in façade. And controlling something. And then, I think, a lot changed when I had kids, and I was, like, 'Fuck, I can't control anything.'"

Murphy still savors aspects of his old reputation: a show is only as good as its villain, he told the "Pose" writers, who call him Elektra. He informed me that he's a temperamental triple Scorpio—a warning that doubled as a brag. Murphy is a fan of the Real Housewives franchise, and is friendly with many of its stars. He so adores Norma Desmond, the aging diva of "Sunset Boulevard," that he jokes about wanting to direct episodes while using only her lines. He has disdain for the screenwriter whose body is found floating in Desmond's pool. "It's like 'Good, he deserved it.' He lied to her. He should've told her the truth about that script. And he should've made the script good!"

Murphy is aware that his "relentless output" is sometimes viewed with suspicion. "The word 'prolific' is a dirty word, like 'camp,'" he said. "Like, 'Why can't he be like David Chase and do one thing?'" Murphy is both sensitive to criticism and sensitive to the criticism that he's sensitive to criticism. He tries to avoid reviews but knows the name of every TV critic. When the writer Miriam Bale wrote a feminist

critique of "Feud," then tweeted, "I want to hit Ryan Murphy over the head w/ a can of Bon Ami" (a "Mommie Dearest" reference), he obtained her e-mail address and asked her to give him a call. He was astounded by my suggestion that this was manipulative. He is convinced that if reviewers knew him personally, they'd be more sympathetic to his work. This is true, but it's also crazy.

Murphy's method of simultaneously overseeing multiple shows is unusual, no doubt, but energy begets energy. He is intensely organized, with a plan for each hour: if you just do one small thing after another, he told me, you can create something immaculate and immense. He doesn't get colds, he said; every few weeks, he has an I.V. drip of vitamins. And though he brims with ideas—I once witnessed him unfurling a truly nutty subplot, for "The Politician," involving Mossad agents—writing is not his existential passion, as it is for some TV creators. He's no keyboard introvert; he's a ringmaster who loves spreadsheets. He's a self-saboteur, too, devising the perfect marketing campaign, then alienating critics with a blast of hauteur. "I have a hubris problem," he told me, with humility. "I keep thinking that I'm past it, but I'm not past it."

Murphy is also a collector, with an eye for the timeliest idea, the best story to option. Many of his shows originate as a spec script or as some other source material. (Murphy owned the rights to the memoir "Orange Is the New Black" before Jenji Kohan did, if you want to imagine an alternative history of television.) "Glee" grew out of a script by Ian Brennan; "Feud" began as a screenplay by Jaffe Cohen and Michael Zam. These scripts then get their DNA radically altered and replicated in Murphy's lab, retooled with his themes and his knack for idiosyncratic casting. He generally directs the first episode or two. He's deft with titles. During an editing meeting for "Pose," he issued two dozen notes: cut half the dialogue, insert a wider street shot. The show's executive producer, Alexis Martin Woodall, told him that the editor would need three days to make the changes. "No," Murphy said. Woodall explained that the editor's newborn baby was in the hospital. Murphy's eyes widened. He granted the extension, then rattled off exacting, well-intentioned advice about antibiotics and the flu season. "Listen to Dr. Murphy! That baby needs to live through March!" he announced, leaving everyone slightly flabbergasted.

"American Crime Story: The People v. O. J. Simpson," which aired in 2016, was the first Murphy production to receive a perfectly sexy blend of high ratings, critical raves, Emmys, and intellectual prestige. He had been hunting for material after HBO declined to pick up "Open," a sexually graphic pilot about polyamory; his agent Joe Cohen alerted him to a miniseries about the Simpson case, which Fox had been developing with the screenwriting team of Larry Karaszewski and Scott Alexander, until an executive change left the project in limbo. Murphy's name got the show an all-star cast and a big budget. "He was lending us his machine," Karaszewski told me, although he noted that he and Alexander had written the first two scripts and outlined the next four. Nina Jacobson, one of the show's producers, described a deeper involvement. Murphy, she said, had agitated for emotional directness; among other things, he'd zeroed in on a few lines of dialogue about Johnnie Cochran being racially profiled by cops, and turned it into a full scene.



Murphy can be touchy about the acclaim that the series received, describing its success, dismissively, in ad-speak: "It's that rare four-quadrant show. You feel like you're eating Doritos, but the vitamins are hitting." He added, "The only part of 'O.J.' that was truly me was Marcia Clark. But it was an experiment in constraint, and that was the side of me that critics love the most—when it's the side of me that I love the *least*."

His multitasking benefits greatly from the freedoms of cable and streaming: he has zero nostalgia for the twenty-two-episode network grind of a show like "Glee," in which "halfway through Episode 15 you had nothing left to say, the actors were sick, the writers were sick, and it was fucking oatmeal until the end." He favors eight or ten episodes, often with a small writers' room, as with "Pose." He writes scripts for some shows, whereas for others he gives notes; on a few projects, like his HBO adaptation of Larry Kramer's play "The Normal Heart," he's very hands-on. "We left blood on the dance floor," Murphy said, affectionately, of his three-year collaboration with Kramer. "Versace" had one writer, Tom Rob Smith. But Murphy provided close directorial, design, and casting oversight, and he had a strong commitment to the show's themes, particularly the contrast between Versace and Cunanan, two gay men craving success, but only one willing to work for it.

Murphy does have a bad habit of sloughing off ownership when it's convenient. I asked him about a complaint against "Glee" by the musician Jonathan Coulton, whose acoustic reinterpretation of Sir Mix-a-Lot's "Baby Got Back" was imitated, without credit, on the series. (Coulton is a friend of mine.) Murphy said that he was barely involved in "Glee" by then, and had left it up to Fox's legal department. He did say that he would handle the matter differently now: "There's a difference between what's legal and what's ethical."

Even as Murphy has matured, he can still be a tempestuous figure. A black-and-white thinker, he cuts ties with people when he feels betrayed: in 2015, he ended his professional relationship with one of his oldest friends, Dante Di Loreto, who was the president of Ryan Murphy Television. At the same time, Murphy has established a profound intimacy with his closest colleagues, often by strengthening relationships that began as "two scorpions in a hatbox"—his grandmother Myrtle's expression. It's his own House of Abundance.

Falchuk and Murphy call themselves brothers. Murphy describes Landgraf, his "Nip/Tuck" antagonist, as his surrogate father. And Landgraf

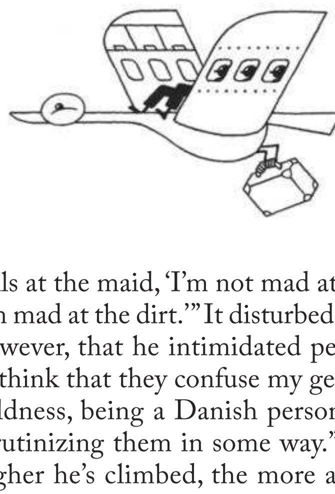
clearly views Murphy in a paternal light, to the point that if what he said about him were printed it would sound sappy. (Landgraf may be the one TV executive who swells with pride at how effectively his protégé resisted his notes.) Similarly, Murphy was once quoted as saying that his dear friend Dana Walden—the head of Fox Television Group, and the godmother of Murphy's children—had "properly mothered" him. "I was very offended!" she said, laughing. "I'm twenty-eight days older than him."

Unlike most TV writers, Murphy remains unambiguously fascinated by celebrity, savoring events like the Met Ball, where he was thrilled to be manhandled by a tipsy Madonna. His writer Tim Minear joked that Murphy's "What's the scoop?" line is an undermining conversational cue: "You just had dinner with Lady Gaga—*that's* the scoop!" But Murphy also simply loves actors, and roots for their success. Murphy called Jonathan Groff after the début of his new series for Netflix, "Mindhunter," and got weepy, thrilled that Groff, who is openly gay, had been cast in a role that had "electric and real" heterosexual sex scenes. Sarah Paulson is grateful for the "rare sunshine" that Murphy has cast on her career, giving her a wild range of roles, from conjoined twins to Marcia Clark. Paulson has fond memories of filming one of the most daring scenes in "Asylum": a brutal conversion-therapy sequence in which her character, a lesbian, masturbated while receiving electric shocks. "It just doesn't occur to me to say no to him," she said. "It's a superpower of his."

On occasion, Murphy fantasized to me about taking a break: perhaps he would take a two-month vacation, or delegate more to others. But, in January, on the day he received the Norman Lear Achievement Award, we had brunch at Barneys in Beverly Hills—at his regular table, in the center of the room—and he acknowledged that it would likely never happen. After having children, he said, "I thought I would become much less driven and calmer, stay at home and make a strudel. No, I became even more insane and driven by a mission." It reminded him of something he'd once read about a man who couldn't wait to turn thirty, when he'd be less interested in sex, and then, as he aged, kept changing the number—to forty, then fifty. "My sexual passions are not that big," Murphy said. "But that idea of waiting for something to die down, or at least go from a rolling boil to a simmer, is something I've looked forward to my whole life, and it's never happened. And I've just decided I'll just go to my grave with that thing."

His anger hadn't fully dissolved, either. "The thing that I get the most angry about is being misunderstood," he told me. "And about control—the deep wounds. Everything else—eh. But I have a very volcanic, quick temper. So sometimes I'll just be as calm as a placid lake for six weeks and, suddenly, out of nowhere, there's this roar that comes out, and it is like dropping a nuclear bomb. And I'm aware when I'm doing it, and people are"—he widened his eyes, pulled back—"plastered up against the wall. And when it's done I feel like I've released something, and I'm, like, 'Let's go back to it!' And they're, like, 'What?' But I've had that since I was a child. The eruptions were much more frequent. I'm not proud of it, but it's also—that's who I am."

He'd had a conflict that week with a colleague. "I'm, like, 'I'm not mad at you at all.' It's like that scene in 'Mommie Dearest' where Joan Crawford



yells at the maid, 'I'm not mad at you, I'm mad at the dirt.'" It disturbed him, however, that he intimidated people. "I think that they confuse my genetic coldness, being a Danish person, for scrutinizing them in some way." The higher he's climbed, the more aware he's become of how easy it is to abuse power. He told me that he's determined to raise others up, particularly those who felt as excluded as he had. He worried, sometimes, that critics were right about his early work: perhaps it *had* lacked "soulfulness," and he'd gone in too hard for shock value. When I praised the filmic technique of a rape scene in "Asylum," he told me that he would never make something like that now; becoming a father had changed his tolerance for violence. "I just don't want to put that in the world," he said.

At the same time, he knew that he wouldn't be where he was without having fought for what he wanted. "I'm very aware that if you take out your bad mood on people who have no equity you're kind of an asshole," he said. "But I also don't think you become successful, particularly in Hollywood, without having the ability to yell, loudly, 'This is not what I want!'"

Falchuk said that it had been part of his "life journey" to learn from Murphy's more assertive style of masculinity—his ability to push past resistance in order to achieve his vision. Falchuk was curious to see how the Netflix deal might change Murphy. "We still have conversations about 'feuds' and 'fatwas,' as he calls them, with people. I'm, like, 'Is there a place for forgiveness? Are we at war with Eastasia?' But he needs an enemy to fuel him." Falchuk doesn't mind if his name isn't on everyone's lips. "If I was someone who did want that, I wouldn't be working with Ryan—there's no room for two of him there," he said. "I have a great life. I go home every day happy, happy, happy." Falchuk wishes only for Murphy to feel the same way: "I would love if he could enjoy his success more."

Bart Brown, Murphy's old friend, told me charming stories about Murphy at his least guarded—riffing on Melanie songs, taking road trips up the California coast. Murphy's self-confidence helped Brown fight his own self-loathing, Brown said. After years of working in Hollywood, Brown, a bohemian with a beard, has become an "intuitive"—an emotional healer. "We're surprisingly unkind to one another," he said of the gay men of L.A. "In this generation, I think we are all a little damaged." He finds it particularly wonderful to see Murphy take joy in having a family, something that once seemed like an impossible dream for

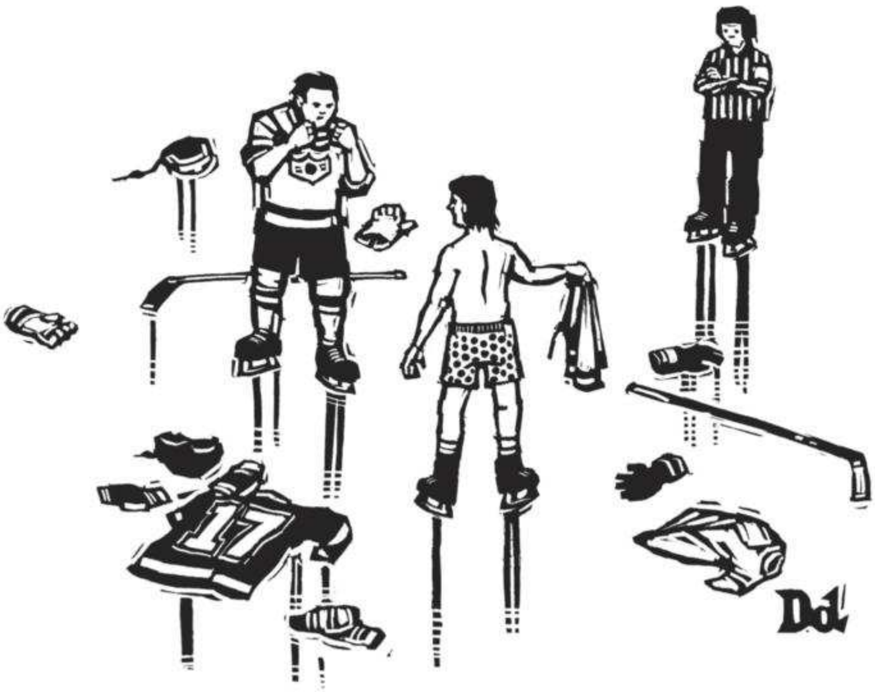
gay men. "David grounds him," he said. "Which is a good thing, because his career is not slowing down."

David Miller's romance with Murphy began in 2010, more than fifteen years into their friendship. They were both in New York at the time, and Miller asked him to dinner, saying, "I want a *date*." Murphy cancelled his plans. "It was kind of like—I don't want to say, 'Game on,' but we knew what was up, because we'd flirted over the years," Miller told me. "We were at an age where we were both serious about wanting a relationship, wanting children."

The two had met in 1996, at a West Hollywood Adjacent restaurant called Muse, a stylish hangout for gay men during an era when people had to stay closeted at work. Bryan Lourd was often there, as was Madonna. Miller, who grew up in L.A., was awed by Murphy's swagger: he didn't care who knew he was gay. By the time they got together romantically, they'd seen each other's lowest moments. They were married, in 2012, on the beach in Provincetown, with just an officiant present. Miller has a tattoo on his calf depicting a lighthouse and the wedding date, July 4th.

Miller, an athletic cowboy type, barely recognizes celebrities, and cares very much about sports. He once took Murphy to a football game; Murphy wore a Tom Ford overcoat and read *Vogue* the whole time. Miller's own path to self-acceptance ran through rehab; he hardly remembers the nineties, which, he said, is a blessing. Dana Walden called Miller a "decent, soulful person" who is well matched with Murphy, in part, because he has no interest in seizing the spotlight.

The year they married, Murphy produced a Norman Lear-style sitcom loosely based on their lives, "The New Normal," which lasted only a season, on NBC. At first, Miller was wary of having their lives portrayed. But as he watched the show—which featured their Burmese dogs and their Range Rover but only specks of their true selves—he changed his mind. In retrospect, Miller wishes that the show had been more autobiographical, making the emotional world of one gay couple accessible to a larger audience.



"Wait—we're fighting, right?"

Six months after they were married, they had Logan, through a birth surrogate. He is a funny, bossy, volcano-loving boy who trailed after Murphy and me during a tour of their Los Angeles house, eager to show me a view of his favorite tree. In 2015, Murphy and Miller had Ford, a quiet, watchful child. As an infant, he had trouble breathing, leading to a visit from first responders, an incident that helped inspire "9-1-1." When Ford was eighteen months old, Miller took him for a routine checkup. The doctor found a mass the size of a tennis ball in Ford's abdomen. Miller called Murphy, who raced over.

After Murphy heard the news, he vomited, and couldn't stop all day long. He had never experienced such a loss of control. Eventually, Miller called a nurse, so that Murphy could be rehydrated. "When you hear your son has cancer, your first thought is of death," Miller said. The couple was lucky: Ford's tumor, a neuroblastoma, hadn't spread, and after surgery he didn't need radiation or chemo. But there were two anxious years of scans and follow-ups. "I'm just glad I was sober," Miller said. "I can't imagine going through it without having a clear head."

Aware of their good fortune as wealthy parents, they have funded a floor at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, which, Miller said, doesn't "turn anybody back, insurance or not." Initially, Murphy kept the story private, but then they decided that it could be helpful to other families if they talked about it. "It just takes the stigma out of it," Miller said. "To realize, 'Oh, other people are going through this.' You see hope. Just because your child has this doesn't mean he is going to die."

Murphy's Los Angeles home, a Spanish Colonial formerly owned by Diane Keaton, has deep shelves for the art and design books—about Titian, Goya, Damien Hirst—that he consults for inspiration. In a living room, there is a Doug Aitken piece called "Buffalo"; a Keith Haring painting is mounted over Murphy and Miller's bed; an erotic Ruven Afanador photograph is tucked near the bathroom, away from the family area. Each morning, Murphy makes his bed, meticulously, a ritual that he's performed since childhood. (He often makes Logan's bed, too, because his son argued that his father has more fun doing it.) The

family will soon move to the place that Murphy has been renovating—a sprawling ranch house with plenty of white space. Their current neighborhood is too central, Murphy told me: tourist buses go by. A famous gay couple with children is a target.

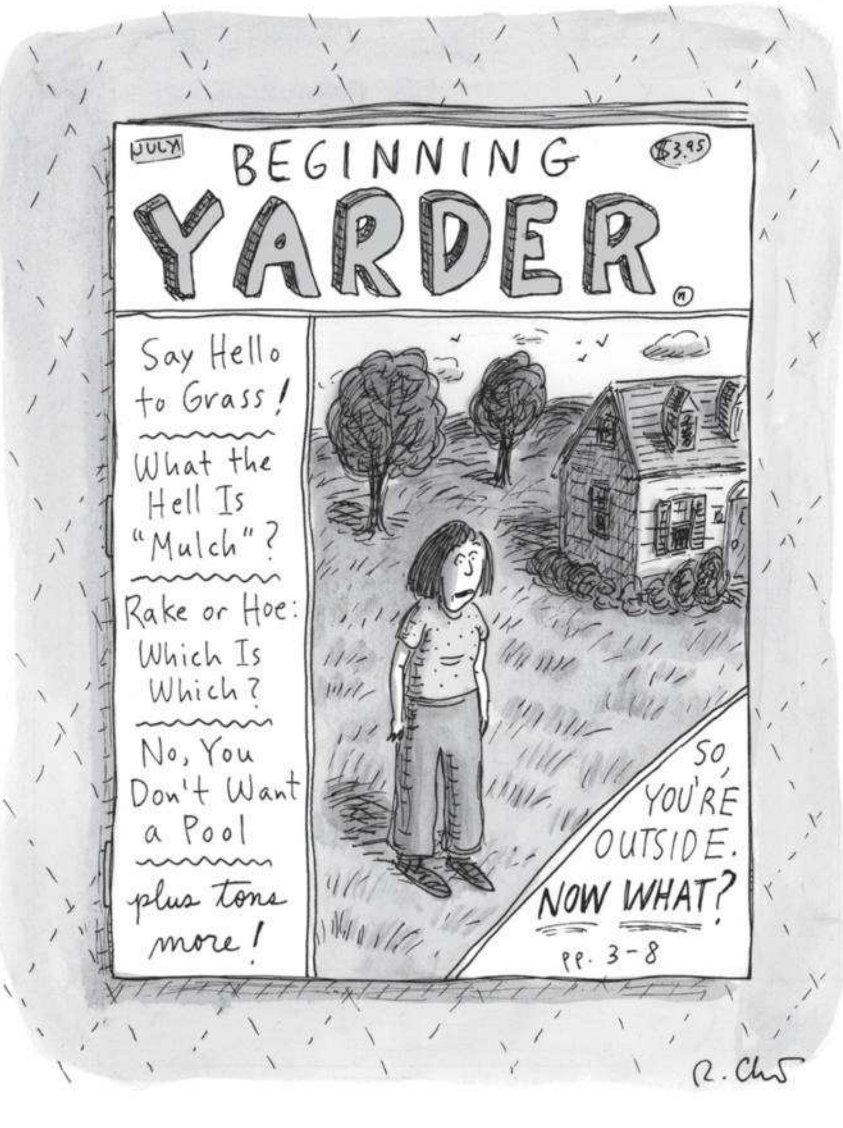
Miller and I leafed through their wedding album while Murphy watched "Willy Wonka & The Chocolate Factory" with Logan. When Murphy reëmerged, I proposed that we look at his father's letter, something he'd suggested doing a few days earlier. "This will be so good for your story," he said, walking to the kitchen.

At first, he couldn't find it—the envelope was buried deep in the drawer. He rifled through old photographs and DVDs as he and Miller apologized, mortified by what seemed to be the only disorganized thing in the house. Finally, Murphy pulled it out: two pages that his father had typed while in the final stages of prostate cancer.

Murphy had me read it first and describe it to him. It was a distressing experience. The letter was certainly apologetic, expressing sorrow about the distance between them, but the tone was abstract—with strange inaccuracies, like a rebuke for skipping a family wedding that Ryan said he did attend. His father thanked him for the financial help that he had provided during his illness. He expressed disappointment at having not been informed when Ryan had visited Chicago, to appear on "Oprah." He didn't mention beating Ryan as a child, but he said that he regretted not understanding Ryan's dreams, for responding to them with anger, perceiving them as personal insults.

"That's true," Murphy said. He told me a story about one of those vacation trips to Florida. While the nun snoozed in the back seat, his father asked the boys what they wanted to be when they grew up. Darren said that he wanted to be a firefighter, stay in Indiana, and always live near his mom and dad. (This came to pass, in part: Darren works as a magistrate judge in Indiana, and lives, with his family, three miles from their mother.) Ryan said that he wanted to go to Hollywood and be a star and have a mansion and never return to Indiana. His father pulled the car over and slapped him, horrifying his mother and embarrassing her in front of the nun.

Murphy looked down at the letter, as if gazing off a cliff. "If I ever had to write a letter like this to my child, I would honestly die," he said, glancing up. He had hoped that it would be a "true mea culpa," but it only made him sad: "It's all just a tragedy and a mystery." He had struggled to view his parents with compassion—as flawed people, like him, who did their best. He'd tried to maintain ties with his mother, too, to let her be a doting grandmother to his children, as Myrtle had been to him. But not all wounds heal. "It's very weird when your own parent thinks of you this way," he marvelled, putting the letter down. "As if an unapproachable celebrity."



Last August, Murphy was working at home on a script for "Pose" when the news broke that Shonda Rhimes, the creator of "Scandal" and "Grey's Anatomy," had signed a hundred-million-dollar, four-year deal with Netflix. Murphy recalled, "And my agent wrote and said, 'It is now the wild, wild West, and you have the biggest gun in town.'"

Murphy's contract at Fox was scheduled to expire this July. But, in December, Disney announced plans to buy Fox and its subsidiaries, including FX. Various corporate suitors, including Netflix and Amazon, began offering him creative freedom and riches unheard of in TV. C.A.A.'s Bryan Lourd and Joe Cohen handled the negotiations.

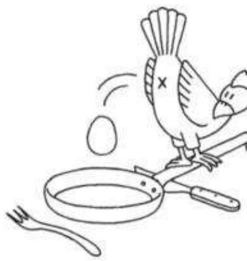
He chose Netflix, in part, because he was impressed by the company's vision for the medium: data-driven, global, immediate, funded by subscriptions, not ads. There was history there, too. Ted Sarandos, Netflix's chief content officer, told me that "Nip/Tuck" was the first show the service had streamed while it was still airing.

Netflix is coy about ratings, but Sarandos said that sizable "taste-based clusters" enjoyed Murphy's brand of "humor and sexiness and danger." "We're not going to ask him to round off his edges," he said. When the news broke, Twitter began to speculate. Would there be greater consistency to a Ryan Murphy series released all at once? A new pacing to a show unbroken by ads? Some questioned why his deal was three times as big as Rhimes's. I texted Murphy my congratulations. "Thank u," he texted back. "Nerve wracking and weepy." He and Miller had been celebrating at a restaurant, but he got very emotional, and worried that it looked as if they were having an argument, so they left. In an e-mail, he joked, "My Velvet Rage has suddenly been monetized."

Later, in New York, on the set of "Pose," he told me about his tentative programming plans. Netflix needed more L.G.B.T.Q. content, he said, like a glossy gay soap opera, a show in the tradition of "The L Word" but "aspirational"—"not poor people eating pad thai." He would make movies, too: he'd been talking to Julianne Moore. He was interested in documentaries, and was considering collaborating with Paltrow in "the wellness space." He said, "I would watch an entire hour about adrenal collapse." He'd be getting his own row on the Netflix home page, as if he were a genre: "Sci-Fi Thrillers," "Cerebral Indies," "Ryan Murphy." He'd spent enough years in the writers' room, he told me. He loved the idea of expressing an even grander kind of creativity, like a studio head—or the Pope.

A few weeks after the deal was made, Murphy, on a private plane from Los Angeles to New York, was cuddled up in a gray boiled-cashmere sweater immense enough to qualify as a trenchcoat, accessorized with a Georgian mourning necklace. Miller was also on the plane, sitting across the aisle; he was wearing a jaunty fisherman's cap and watching "Pose" on a laptop. Murphy kept stealing glances at him. "I'm watching him watching it," he said.

"He's up to the end of the first act," Murphy told me, as we chatted about Olivia de Havilland, who was suing him for the gossipy portrayal of her on "Feud." (She lost the case.) He admitted that it hadn't been fun when "The Good Wife" had satirized him, in an episode about the copyright-infringement case brought by Jonathan Coulton. We were returning from a momentous occasion: a staged interview with Barbra Streisand, an experience that he had found more nerve-wracking than the Emmys. When Miller finished "Pose," he told Murphy that he liked it, especially the way that the pilot dealt with the characters' vulnerability. Murphy smiled mischievously at Miller, who was lounging, his cap tipped low. "I can't take you seriously when you look like Charlotte Rampling in 'The Night Porter,'" he told him.



Murphy's upcoming roster had changed. The scripts for "Katrina" had been abandoned, the writers laid off; the season would now be based on Sheri Fink's book "Five Days at Memorial." After running into Monica Lewinsky at an Oscars party, he was having second thoughts about doing her story. (Later, he had second thoughts about his second thoughts.)

A new idea had bubbled up, however, as he absorbed the #MeToo crisis. The show would be called "Consent"—potentially, a new "American Crime Story." It would follow a "Black Mirror" model: every episode would explore a different story, starting with an insidery account of the Weinstein Company. There would be an episode about Kevin Spacey, one about an ambiguous he-said-she-said encounter. Each episode could have a different creator. The project sounded fascinating, but it had emerged at a liminal moment: Murphy was no longer fully at FX but not yet set up at Netflix. The Netflix deal would officially begin in July. "That's the great thing about Popes," he said later, when we talked about who would run his old shows. "When one dies, you get a new Pope." "Pose"—a sweet experiment in releasing control, in opening the door to new voices, new kinds of creators—would be his final series for FX, whether it turned out to be a hit or a flop.

In the meanwhile, Murphy had scored a ratings bonanza with Fox's "9-1-1," a wackadoo procedural featuring stories like one about a baby caught in a plumbing pipe. It was his parting gift to Dana Walden. "Versace" had been, by certain standards, a flop: lower ratings, mixed reviews. Artistically, though, it was one of Murphy's boldest shows, with a backward chronology and a moving performance by Criss as Cunanan, a panicked dandy hollowed out by self-hatred. After the finale aired, a new set of reviews emerged. Matt Brennan, on Paste, argued that "Versace" had been subjected to "the straight glance"—a critical gaze that skims queer art, denying its depths. "Even critics sympathetic to the series seem as uncomfortable with its central subject as the Miami cops were with those South Beach fags," Brennan wrote.

Murphy was reading a new oral history of Tony Kushner's "Angels in America," in which, in one scene, Roy Cohn denies being gay because, he barks, homosexuals lack power: they are "men who know nobody and who nobody knows." The line echoes one in "Versace." A homeless junkie dying of AIDS tells the cops, bitterly, why gay men couldn't stop talking about the designer: "We all imagined what it would be like to be so rich and so powerful that it doesn't matter that you're gay."

In Miami, Murphy said that he disliked being labelled a gay showrunner: "I don't think that, in the halls of Fox, I'm ever thought of as a gay person. I'm thought of as a whole, a person with responsibilities who is a businessperson and a leader and a creator." In late May, Murphy is scheduled to receive a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame—the ultimate gratification for the boy who turned his bedroom into Studio 54. At last, he knew everybody and everybody knew him.

As the plane began a turbulent descent, a flight attendant walked down the aisle to reassure us. I made sick jokes about the plane crashing, and the kinds of headlines that would result. "Please, please, don't talk about it," Murphy said. He looked out the window, watching New York's glittering surfaces tilt back into view. He reached across the aisle, searching for Miller's hand. ♦

THE POLITICAL SCENE

THE SOUTHERN STRATEGIST

The Reverend William Barber's effort to build a populist interracial coalition against poverty.

By Jelani Cobb

At first glance, the crowds of people congregating on a block of Mulberry Street, a stretch of squat brick buildings near downtown Memphis, on the morning of April 4th, might have been there for a variety of reasons. The street venders selling T-shirts and posters and the jumbotron set up near a parking lot suggested the start of a music festival; delegations of men and women dressed in their union best pointed to a labor rally. But the plaintive notes of gospel music drifting from speakers and the black bunting draped over a balcony of the building at the center of the activities indicated a more sombre occasion. The space behind the bunting had begun as an overlook, became a crime scene, and is now a historic site. The hundreds of people, most but by no means all of them black, were gathering at the Lorraine Motel and the National Civil Rights Museum, to mark the moment when, fifty years earlier, Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated as he stood on the balcony outside Room 306. The past five years have been a season of semicentennials: 2013, 2014, and 2015 brought anniversaries of the triumphs of the March on Washington, the Civil Rights Act, and the Voting Rights Act. This year recalls losses: King's death and, with it, the hopes of a signal phase of the civil-rights struggle.

Speeches, some of them from associates of King's, went on all day. James Lawson, who, at eighty-nine, is nearly as dynamic as he was when he helped organize the Freedom Rides of 1961, spoke about the landmark strike of black sanitation workers, called in Memphis in early 1968 to protest unsafe work conditions and unequal pay. It was Lawson who had invited King to Memphis, to lend his support. (A sanitation worker at the commemoration who had travelled with a group from New York City told me that it was important to reclaim King's connections to organized labor.) Jesse Jackson, who was with King when he was shot, movingly recounted the final moments of his life. Gina Belafonte, the daughter of King's close friend Harry Belafonte, runs Sankofa, an organization that connects the arts with activism, and she spoke about the imperatives of culture in the service of social change. But the day was warm, and, by the afternoon, the crowd was beginning to grow restless. As with any rite that is repeated at regular intervals, even for an event so consequential, the speeches began to seem rote. The comparisons between the past and the present and the inevitable declarations that we still have "so far to go," which tend to reinforce how creative and distinctive those monumental events of the past were, sometimes raised the dispiriting question of whether anything being done in the present would warrant such celebration in the future.

All this added to the anticipation surrounding one of the final speakers of the day. The Reverend Dr. William Barber, a pastor of Greenleaf Christian Church, in Goldsboro, North Carolina, has become, in the past few years, an indispensable figure in the civil-rights landscape, and, perhaps, the individual most capable of crafting a broad-based political counterpoint to the divisiveness of Trumpism. Charismatic, tireless, eloquent, and yet resistant to an excessive nostalgia for the glory days of the movement, he has presence. At around five o'clock, he came out on the balcony. A tall, heavyset, handsome man with the kind of face that people describe as being "of indeterminate age"—he is fifty-four—Barber was dressed in a black suit, a magenta shirt with a clergyman's collar, and a white clerical stole that read, "Jesus Was a Poor Man." He has an ursine bearing, and moves methodically, which gave the applause a moment to build.

Allotted just five minutes to speak, Barber began by addressing not King's victories but the burdens that he bore. "The weight of these years, by the time he got to Memphis, to stand with black men who were organizing a garbage strike, were heavy," Barber said. "By the time he got to Memphis, he had racists, moderates, politicians, a President, and even jealous criticism from black leaders, who used his position against the Vietnam War as an excuse to diminish his status in the eyes of liberal white America, while raising their own. And then the bullet rang. And his body fell." But what was more important than mourning King's suffering, Barber said, was honoring the work that he undertook in the last months of his life: confronting racism, to be sure, but also militarism and poverty.

Barber speaks in a resonant baritone, with precise phrasing, but he is a true thespian of the pulpit: his eyes widen in mock surprise or squint in faux confusion at an act of outrage or injustice. Sometimes, after making a point, he whirls around, looking over his shoulder as if to see whether anyone has overheard him. From the balcony, he boomed, "We don't need a commemoration, we need a *reconsecration*." He had blown past the five-minute mark, but the crowd was with him. He warned, "The Bible says woe unto those who love the tombs of the prophets." The duty of the living, he said, is not simply to recall the martyrs of the movement but to continue their work. "We've got to hold up the banner until every person has health care, we've got to hold it up until every child is lifted in love, we've got to hold it up until every job is a living-wage job, until every person in poverty has guaranteed subsistence." He finished to loud and sustained applause. Shortly afterward, at a



"I worry," Barber said, "about the way that faith is cynically used by some to serve hate, fear, racism, and greed."

PHOTOGRAPH BY STEFAN RUIZ



"No, you're not in a box. You're in an exit row. And I need you to acknowledge that verbally."

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minute past six, the time that King was shot, an enormous bell in the motel courtyard rang thirty-nine times—once for each year of King's life—and the crowd on Mulberry Street began to disperse.

Barber had offered the most concrete answer that day to the question King asked in the title of his last book, "Where Do We Go from Here?," and he wasn't speaking rhetorically. For the past three years, Barber and the Reverend Liz Theoharis, a co-director of the Kairos Center, at Union Theological Seminary, in New York, who stood next to him as he spoke in Memphis, have led an effort to revive King's most radical project: the 1968 Poor People's Campaign. At the commemoration, Jesse Jackson spoke about how King, after shepherding the movement to the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act, had begun to wonder if he had achieved enough. Despite the pivotal new laws, he knew that the structures of racism, inequality, and injustice had hardly crumbled. So he proposed to broaden the movement's targets from the race-specific concerns of fighting Jim Crow to an assault on the plight of the impoverished across racial lines.

The Poor People's Campaign demanded full employment, a guaranteed basic income, and access to capital for small and minority businesses. King's decision to support the Memphis strike was a way of recognizing labor struggles as part of the movement. The campaign called on people across the country to travel to Washington, D.C., where, for six weeks over the summer, protesters occupied tents on the National Mall, in a camp called Resurrection City. The idea had roots in both the 1963 March on Washington and the 1932 Bonus Army marches of First World War veterans who, left destitute by the Great Depression, set up a camp in the capital and insisted that their pensions be paid early. The centerpiece of the 1968 campaign was a mule-cart procession of people from Marks, Mississippi, the poorest town in the poorest county of the poorest state in the country.

Barber and Theoharis met in 2013, at the opening of the Kairos Center, where he was one of the speakers. (The center advocates a grassroots approach to ending poverty, in which poor people are the key elements of leadership.) At the time, he was launching his Moral Monday movement in North Carolina, enlisting a broad-based alliance of Christians, Muslims, Jews, nonbelievers, blacks, Latinos, poor whites, feminists, environmentalists, and others to protest the conservative agenda of the state legislature. Theoharis, an ordained Presbyterian minister, had spent twenty-five years doing organizing and social-justice work among domestic workers and Native Americans, and advocating for the rights of the homeless. The new project is called the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival. This time, the demands include federal and state living-wage laws, equity in education, an end to mass incarceration, a single-payer health-care system, and the protection of the right to vote.

Beginning on Mother's Day and continuing until June 23rd—the last full day of the 1968 campaign—thousands of people in some forty states are expected to commit acts of civil disobedience and protest against policies enacted at the federal and, especially, the state level, that have disproportionately affected poor people. "If you have bad voting laws in your state," Barber told me, "that's not done in Congress, that's something done at the local level." The movement is largely intended to be an independent undertaking of community groups, but it is aided by Theoharis's indefatigable organizing efforts and Barber's ability to project his charisma from the pulpit and the TV screen—he is a regular presence on CNN and, in particular, MSNBC.

On the left, Barber tends to inspire unsolicited testimonials. Last winter, I found myself seated in front of Senator Elizabeth Warren, of Massachusetts, on a train from New York to Boston. We started talking, and I mentioned that I was writing a story about Barber. She said that she had participated in an event with him years earlier, and had followed his work since. She was impressed by his intelligence and his commitment. "He's the real thing," she said. A few weeks later, at a restaurant in Cambridge, Cornel West used the same words when he saw that I had a copy of Barber's book "The Third Reconstruction," which is partly a memoir of his activism and partly an elucidation of his ideas for the movement that he is attempting to build. "That brother is the real thing," West told me. Theoharis has also heard the phrase applied to Barber. "He has really given his life and all that is in it to the struggle," she said. "And I don't think that happens every time. I don't think that, in this society, that actually is heralded, or valued, or upheld as what you're supposed to do. But he embodies this."

His work has been made more difficult by the fact that he suffers from ankylosing spondylitis, an arthritic condition that causes him chronic pain, and forces him to lean forward when he stands, as if he were poring over a book, or speaking to a child. Last year, on an icy night in Boston, I watched as he arrived in an S.U.V. at Trinity Church, on Copley Square, where he was scheduled to speak. He had been resting, fully reclined, in the passenger seat, but, in a ritual that came to be familiar to me, he hoisted himself up, swung his legs out the door, shifted his weight onto a cane, stood, and slowly made his way across the pavement and up the church steps. I asked him how he copes with his condition, given the schedule that he keeps. He chuckled, and told me that once, when he was visiting an encampment of homeless people, a woman offered him her chair, one of her few possessions. He was moved by the gesture. "I first had to put my own struggle in perspective," he said. "I had to turn my ankylosing into a testimony, in this sense: every time I'm fighting for health care, I'm reminded I have it. How many people are there that have this disease but don't have health care? It gives you a sense of deep—not just sympathy but empathy, right?" He reminded me that Harriet Tubman suffered from epilepsy, and that Franklin Roosevelt commanded the country for thirteen years, through the Depression and global war, despite having been stricken with polio—and that all the heroes of the Bible had some physical or mental challenge. As Barber sees it, the challenges that he confronts are shared by many who are called to serve; it would be indecent to complain.

Barber's career has veered between the political and the religious, but the two paths often intersect: he argues politics from a theological perspective, while his sermons are informed by the lessons of the streets. When he mentions "the good book," he is as likely to be referring to Howard Zinn's progressive primer "A People's History of the United States" as he is to the one that contains the Old and New Testaments. He learned both traditions at home.

Barber was born on August 30, 1963, in Indianapolis. His mother, Eleanor, a government clerk, had gone into labor forty-eight hours earlier, on the day of the March on Washington, he likes to point out. His father, for whom he was named, was an ordained minister in the predominantly white Disciples of Christ denomination, who held degrees in physics and social work as well as in theology. Like millions of African-Americans in the first half of the twentieth century, Barber's father had left the South—North Carolina, in his case—as part of the Great Migration to Northern and Midwestern cities. He met Eleanor in Indiana, and they settled there.

Despite having achieved a middle-class stability that was infinitely more difficult to maintain in the South, in 1968, the couple heeded the call of E. V. Wilkins, a high-school principal and family friend who asked them to help him with a school-integration movement that he was attempting to build in Roper, a small town in the eastern part of North Carolina, near where Barber's father had grown up. When Barber was in second grade, his parents enrolled him as one of the first black students in the local elementary school. He told me jokingly, "My first foray into activist work was not of my choice." It was a family undertaking: his mother worked in the high-school office, and his father taught science. Eleanor, who is now eighty-five, still works at the school.

In "The Third Reconstruction," Barber writes that his father could have secured a prestigious position as the pastor of a large urban church, but that coming home to Roper "was a vow of poverty" for him. He was respected in clerical circles—when he wasn't teaching, he travelled the state as an itinerant preacher—but he was such an uncompromising and fervent critic of racism that some black congregations were hesitant to host him. As a child, Barber accompanied his father on his travels. He learned that the concerns of religion could hardly be distinct from those of earthly matters, like racial injustice. He remembers visiting a friend of his father's, a bishop, who had run afoul of some local whites, and praying together in the man's yard that he might be kept safe. As night fell, the friend went inside and placed shotguns by the windows. "What's that for?" Barber asked. His father answered, "That's an extra precaution in case the prayers don't work."

In 1978, at the age of fifteen, Barber was elected president of the local N.A.A.C.P. Youth Council. Three years later, he enrolled in North Carolina Central University, a historically black institution in Durham. In his senior year, he met a first-year nursing student, Rebecca McLean, when she joined a march he had organized to support Jesse Jackson's 1984 Presidential bid. They married three years later and had five children; she works as a psychiatric nurse. Barber is hesitant to talk about his family, because death threats are still an occupational hazard for civil-rights leaders. "I believe he is doing what the Church as a whole, all of us, are called to do," Rebecca Barber told me. "And that is do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God." That sense of abiding purpose, she said, has allowed her not to dwell on the threats, which, in recent years, have grown in number.

Initially, Barber resisted entering the clergy; he wanted to be a civil-rights lawyer. "I had developed a distaste for the Church," he told me. "I always believed in God, but I was struggling with the Church piece of it." He chose Central in part because there was no religious-course requirement. But in his senior year he had a crisis of conscience over the question of what he could do with his life versus what he was called to do with it. In March of 1985, he discussed his dilemma with his father, who urged him to distinguish between the failings of the Church and the perfection of God. Three weeks later, Barber preached his first sermon, on the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan, he noted, was not concerned about how to get into Heaven, the focus of too much of religion, in his opinion. Instead, "he chose to go down into the ditch, he chose to go down to where people were hurting." After graduating, Barber enrolled at Duke University, to earn a master's degree in divinity. His father died in 1988, but Barber still often mentions him when talking about his understanding of Christianity.

At Duke, Barber studied with C. Eric Lincoln, the acclaimed scholar of the black church whose work explored the

ways that race had shaped American Christianity—rendering the religion, for example, entirely capable of reconciling fidelity to its creed with slavery and racism. He also read the works of Reinhold Niebuhr, whose concept of Christian realism led Barber toward a practical theology, a way of faith that is rooted in the struggles of common people and seeks justice and mercy against unfavorable odds. His studies gave him an intellectual scaffolding that was no less important than what he had learned from his father about the moral and practical obligations of faith. Later, he met the theologians Paul Tillich and James Cone, whose thinking also became a major influence on him. His approach to faith, however, put him at odds with the Moral Majority version of evangelicalism that was ascendant in the nineteen-eighties. He told me on the phone one evening that those Christians "say so much about areas where the Bible says very little"—abortion, homosexuality—"and speak so little about the issues where the Bible says so much," like poverty, empathy, and justice.

Meanwhile, Barber's belief in the possibility of an alliance of poor people across racial lines was beginning to take shape. The idea may seem radical, particularly in the era of Donald Trump, but it isn't novel; it had a long history even when King proposed it. A number of such alliances formed during Reconstruction, in a grand, if short-lived, experiment in inclusive populism. In North Carolina, the Fusion movement came together to protest the Democratic Party's monetary policy, which hurt both black and white small farmers, and for a time it created one of the most progressive governments in the state's history. In 1894, a Fusion-Republican alliance won every state office up for election, and it sent George Henry White, a black Republican, to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1896. It all came to an end just two years later, with the Wilmington race riots, in which an estimated two thousand white men attacked black residents, burned black businesses, and unseated Fusionist officials, replacing them with white Democrats, in what was essentially a coup d'état. The movement of resurgent white nationalists, unironically referred to as "redemption," had triumphed in North Carolina. Nevertheless, the inspiration of the Fusionists has stayed with Barber throughout his career.

After Duke, Barber was hired as the chair of the North Carolina State Human Relations Commission, in Durham. He travelled around the state investigating instances of discrimination in housing and employment. He was committed to the work, but, in the summer of 1993, when he was thirty, Greenleaf Christian Church, in Goldsboro, part of the Disciples of Christ denomination, asked him to be its pastor, and he decided to accept the offer. A month later, he awoke unable to move. Ankylosing spondylitis causes joints and vertebrae in the spine to fuse; Barber's neck, hips, and the base of his spine had essentially frozen in place. He had played football in high school, and the pain and stiffness in his back that signalled the onset of the disease had been misdiagnosed as a bad disk. There is no cure for ankylosing spondylitis, but therapy and medication can alleviate some of its symptoms.

He spent nearly three months in the hospital, and began an intensive, painful process of regaining mobility. He sank into a depression, and encouraged Greenleaf to find an able-bodied pastor, a request that the church rejected. With the assistance of a walker, he was eventually able to take a few tentative steps. He continued to preach at Greenleaf, mastering a technique of swinging the walker behind him in the pulpit and bracing himself against it. One morning in 2005, he managed to walk to the bathroom unassisted. Later that day, he bought a white wooden cane for the blind, which he painted black. He still uses it; battered and weathered, it is a testament to his twelve years of trial and endurance.

In Goldsboro, a city of some thirty thousand, he threw himself into local issues, securing funding to build a community day-care center and housing for low-income families and seniors. He had remained active with the N.A.A.C.P., and in 2005 he was elected president of the North Carolina State Conference, which had a history of front-line activism and outsized personalities. Ella Baker, whose work was key to the successes of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, had organized branches of the N.A.A.C.P. in North Carolina in the nineteen-forties. Barber remembers his father speaking about Baker's work whenever the topic of political organizing came up. "She was a hero in my family," he said. Robert F. Williams, the president of the Union County branch, was known for his defense of two young boys falsely accused of rape in the infamous 1958 "kissing case." The next year, he urged blacks to take up arms in self-defense, a suggestion that alarmed not only the chief of police, Jesse Helms, Sr., the father of the future Republican United States senator, but also Roy Wilkins, the organization's staid, pacifist national president, who suspended him for six months. In 1961, facing a false kidnapping charge, he and his wife fled the country for several years, first to Cuba and then to China; the charges were eventually dropped. He became a legendary figure, and was widely credited with anticipating Malcolm X's statements about the right to self-defense. "Some choose to only focus on Williams's decision to have armed guards," Barber told me, but that overshadowed his contributions, such as his willingness to defend the poorest African-Americans, even those whom other blacks considered "not high enough on the social ladder."

Barber pushed to return the state conference to its dynamic roots. He steered it into a battle in Wake County, where a school board had gutted guidelines promoting racial diversity in classrooms. The organization set about organizing protests and mobilizing voters. The following year, every member of the board who had tried to resegregate the schools was voted out. Barber also built a coalition of social-justice organizations, N.A.A.C.P. chapters, and youth groups from around the state called Historic Thousands on Jones Street, named for the street where the North Carolina General Assembly meets. The idea was to influence legislators' priorities around fourteen key issues, including criminal justice, health care, immigrants' rights, and voting rights.

Unlike most of the South, which reliably gives Republican candidates big majorities, North Carolina is a purple state. But when Barack Obama managed a slim win there in the 2008 Presidential election—becoming the first Democrat to carry the state since Jimmy

Carter—conservatives worried that North Carolina could become a beachhead for Democrats and progressives in the region. Two years later, after the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision allowed a massive infusion of campaign cash from the retail heir James Arthur Pope—the Raleigh *News & Observer* once called Pope "the Knight of the Right"—Republicans took control of both houses of the legislature, for the first time in more than a century. They immediately redrew voting districts, eliminated the earned-income tax credit, introduced a bill that would allow residents to carry firearms in public parks and restaurants, cut funding to prekindergarten education, and engineered a voter-I.D. bill that would have made it disproportionately difficult for African-Americans to vote. (In 2016, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals struck down the voter-I.D. law, saying that it targeted black voters "with almost surgical precision," and earlier this year it declared the redistricting map unconstitutional.)

In 2012, a Republican, Pat McCrory, was elected governor, displacing Beverly Purdue, a Democrat. The McCrory-era legislature passed restrictions on abortion, loosened environmental regulations, and refused Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act, in a state where twenty per cent of the residents lacked health insurance. McCrory also signed a law preventing transgender individuals from using the bathroom that conforms to their gender identity. Conservatives in the state exulted in their ability to fulfill their agenda—and to raise the funds to do so—but there was a boomerang effect: they encouraged a diverse group of dissenters to recognize a common cause.

On April 29, 2013, a Monday, Barber led a group of some seventy-five people, including members of the Historic Thousands coalition, to the state legislature, to protest what Barber has said was the legislature's attempt to persecute minorities and the disadvantaged. As he once put it, "We said if they were going to crucify the poor, the sick, the children, the unemployed, the immigrants, the L.G.B.T., and the women, and then on top of that crucify voting rights, then every crucifixion, as Billy Kyles"—a Tennessee civil-rights leader—"would say, needs a witness." The protesters disrupted the legislature's deliberations and confronted Thom Tillis, the Republican speaker of the House. Police arrested Barber and sixteen others. This was the start of Moral Mondays.

The group returned the following week, and nearly twice as many people were arrested. By the end of the term, fourteen weeks later, more than a thousand protesters had been arrested. The Moral Monday demonstrations continued for four years, with tens of thousands of participants. The protests are largely credited with helping Roy Cooper, a Democrat, narrowly defeat McCrory in the 2016 gubernatorial race.

Barber has a particular disdain for politicians who use racial rhetoric and voter suppression in order to win elections, but whose agenda is broadly damaging to poor whites as well as blacks. "They get elected using racial gerrymandering, then enact policies that affect everybody," he said. He sees the current political polarization as a result of a deception that has driven a good deal of American politics since at least the 1968 Presidential election, when Richard Nixon exploited the resentment of white Southerners in an attempt to draw them into a Republican coalition. The so-called Southern Strategy was, in many respects, the antithesis of King's campaign. "Poverty has been so racialized," Barber told me, "that most people don't even know that, in raw numbers, the majority of poor people are white."

Marian Wright Edelman, the founder of the Children's Defense Fund, which was an outgrowth of the original Poor People's Campaign, also sees a cyclical history of racial division at play. The country "sold poor white men on their skin and denied them basic opportunities," she said. "Their resentment flares up every half century. And you have to constantly fight it back." Demagogic politicians, economic malaise, and racism, she told me, often lead people to "vote against their own interests." The duelling populism of Senator Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump during the 2016 campaign—inclusiveness versus tribalism—was another replay of this conflict. Sanders told me that he thinks Barber "is doing some of the most important work in the country." More precisely, he and Barber share the same theory of social change: "What he understands is that real change never takes place from the top on down," Sanders said. "It is always from the bottom on up, and that's what he is trying to do and what he understands and what he preaches."

I spoke to Barber by phone one night and asked if the prospect of rekindling a Fusion-style alliance is, at this moment, far-fetched. He responded, as he often does, with a story. He met Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, an evangelical minister, twenty years ago. Wilson-Hartgrove had once been a Senate page for Strom Thurmond, of South Carolina, who ran for President in 1948 on a platform of segregation, despite having fathered a child



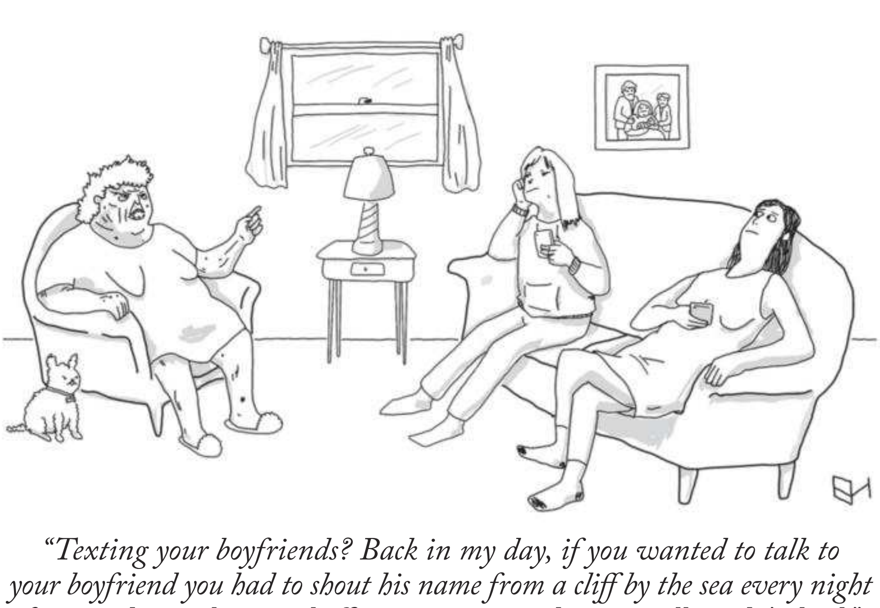
"It's my most personal building yet."

with a black domestic worker employed in his family's home. But, in 1998, Wilson-Hartgrove heard Barber speak at an event organized by the state's Human Relations Commission, in Raleigh, and invited him to visit his all-white Southern Baptist church, in Stokes County. The area was known as a stronghold of the Ku Klux Klan. Barber visited anyway, and the two men developed a friendship that pushed Wilson-Hartgrove to question the racial assumptions he had grown up with, and the ways that they were connected to conservative theology. Eventually, he collaborated with Barber on "The Third Reconstruction." In the afterword to the book, he wrote, "I can trust a man who embraces his enemy and then trusts him to tell his story." Later that night, Barber texted me images from recent Poor People's Campaign rallies in Appalachia, with hundreds of people, most of them white, in the audience.

Moral Mondays brought Barber to the attention of both progressives and Democratic Party officials—the model of large-scale protests against legislative assaults on civil rights was followed in Georgia, Alabama, and Missouri—but it was not until the summer of 2016, when he spoke in a prime-time slot at the Democratic National Convention, in Philadelphia, that he became a nationally recognizable figure. He touched on now familiar themes: the common ground of the disenfranchised and the attenuated brand of morality that has been marketed by religious conservatives. "I worry," Barber said, "about the way that faith is cynically used by some to serve hate, fear, racism, and greed." His message harked back to the politics of King in 1968 and to a kind of liberation theology: "Pay people what they deserve. Share your food with the hungry. Do this and then your nation shall be called a repairer of the breach." This last phrase was a reference to the Book of Isaiah and an admonition to leaders who abuse their authority and deprive the poor. (The reference was strategic: since 2015, Barber has also led an organization called Repairers of the Breach, which seeks to reclaim the notion of morality for progressive activism.) He concluded with an extended riff on the heartlessness of Republican policies and those who would "harden the heart" of American democracy, and called on the assembled Democrats to be "the moral defibrillators of our time," a phrase that brought them to their feet. "We must shock this nation with the power of love, we must shock this nation with the power of mercy," he said. "We can't give up on the heart of our democracy, not now, not ever!" The speech was so rousing and so well received that a headline on an article by Janell Ross in the Washington *Post* read, "THE REV. WILLIAM BARBER DROPPED THE MIC."

The activist contingent in the N.A.A.C.P. hoped that Barber would become the organization's national president, but, instead, the following year, he stepped down from the North Carolina conference (he is still on the national board of directors). There doesn't seem to have been a great deal of acrimony surrounding the departure, although Barber's independent streak and his growing national profile—he had not consulted with the organization before he spoke in Philadelphia—had apparently provoked some discord in the upper ranks. Jotaka Eaddy, who served as a senior adviser to several presidents of the N.A.A.C.P., including Ben Jealous, told me that Barber's departure was "in alignment with his world view." He left, she said, "to create space for someone else to lead, and he focussed on where he was being naturally pulled." Barber told me, "I left after twelve years—that's four years longer than the President of the United States serves." He turned to his work with Repairers of the Breach and to the idea of rebuilding King's coalition.

Barber had already begun talking with Liz Theoharis about creating a national platform to address the intersecting effects of poverty. They then started a Moral Revival tour, which eventually led to a series of discussions including people such as Roz Pelles, the executive director of Repairers of the Breach; Traci Blackmon, the executive minister of justice for the United Church of Christ, and a pastor of a church in Florissant, Missouri; Alan McSurely, an attorney and organizer now based in North Carolina, who had worked with the original Poor People's Campaign; and the civil-rights historian Timothy Tyson, who wrote a biography of Robert F. Williams. McSurely, who is eighty-one, had advised Barber on the Moral Monday movement, and serves on the steering committee for the new project. This working group set the agenda, and Barber and Theoharis began travelling across the country, speaking and leading workshops on organizing and civil-disobedience training. Barber has created a structure that allows him to oversee Greenleaf and the Repairers of the Breach despite his constant travels. He begins each day on conference calls with the officers of the Repairers and then with the leadership of the church. "I don't believe a pastor should be doing everything," he



"Texting your boyfriends? Back in my day, if you wanted to talk to your boyfriend you had to shout his name from a cliff by the sea every night for months until a naval officer came to your house to tell you he's dead."

told me. "I believe in power-sharing."

Barber won't discuss the particulars of any of the actions planned for the campaign, since a number of them will involve civil disobedience, but, he told me, "I can say we intend to nonviolently confront our government and its policies and we will refuse to give up our constitutional right to protest." The campaign has attracted the support of organizations such as the Service Employees International Union, the Fight for $15, and the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, but Barber considers the grassroots network the crucial part of what the group has accomplished. "Our movement is a national call for moral revival," he told me. "Sometimes people will only think of something as national because you have the presence of national organizations. Our focus has been to go to the people first, in the states, on the ground, and build a network of coördinating committees." The campaign approached the larger community organizations only after it had support from local people affected by issues of poverty.

After King's death, the 1968 Poor People's Campaign foundered, dogged by federal surveillance and the infiltration efforts of J. Edgar Hoover. It also strained under the logistical demands of delivering thousands of people who, by definition, lacked resources to take care of themselves, to the nation's capital. The assassination of Robert F. Kennedy, on June 5th, deprived the campaign of one of its most important allies. The number of people in Resurrection City dwindled from three thousand to about five hundred. On June 24th, the police forcibly removed the last occupiers, and later that day, the mayor, fearing a repeat of the unrest in the capital that followed King's death, called in the National Guard (thirty-six years earlier, the Army had been called in to evict the Bonus Marchers). The Poor People's Campaign was over before it had achieved any of its objectives. The movement's most ambitious undertaking became its most conspicuous failure.

The Moral Monday movement captured the imagination of activists across the country, and achieved tangible results in North Carolina, but it remains to be seen whether its tactics can succeed nationwide. Marian Wright Edelman is sanguine about the prospects of the new initiative. Barber, whom she described as "brilliant," is in a position to help finish the work that was begun fifty years ago, she told me. When I asked Barber how he hoped to translate protest into progress, he said, "The civil disobedience is just one part of the plan." A second phase of the campaign will focus on voter registration, building a broader network, and creating a detailed list of policy demands, which will be released late in the summer. "We surely want to influence the 2018 midterm elections and the 2020 Presidential election," Theoharis told me. But they do not plan to endorse candidates or to cast their lot with either of the major political parties. They want to change the political conversation around poverty, to create a climate in which it is impossible for any candidate or party to continue ignoring the subject. In this they have as much in common with the Occupy Movement as with the original Poor People's Campaign. Barber and Theoharis seem to see history as a guide, not a script.



Three weeks after the commemoration in Memphis, Barber spoke at the Performing Arts Center in Montgomery, Alabama, for the opening of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, a monument to the more than forty-four hundred African-Americans who were lynched between the end of Reconstruction and the beginning of the modern civil-rights movement. At the site, a project of the Equal Justice Initiative, led by Bryan Stevenson, hundreds of metal markers list the locations of lynchings and the names of the people who died there. The impact is traumatic, and not simply in a historical sense. Barber told me, "We should be traumatized by the idea that something like this can be seen as normal, and think about the wrongs we've become accustomed to today."

He had spent the previous two days discussing the Poor People's Campaign with Apache activists in Arizona and with representatives of the U.F.C.W. in Las Vegas. But, despite the long journey, in Montgomery, before an audience of about a thousand, he delivered the best speech I have heard him give. It was a sprawling oration, citing the historian Nell Painter, the Constitution, the crusading journalist Ida B. Wells-Barnett, the lyrics to "Strange Fruit," and the speech that King delivered in Montgomery, in 1965, at the end of the march from Selma. That speech, which Barber encouraged the audience to listen to in its entirety, contains King's recitation of the history of populism and the ways that racism disadvantaged both black and white poor people—the points that Barber has been reiterating across the country. (Segregation, King said, was "a simple thing to keep the poor white masses working for near-starvation wages in the years that followed the Civil War.")

Barber touched on his usual themes of inequality and the mistaken priorities of the Church, but the audience erupted in applause when he turned to the monument itself, declaring that "Jesus was lynched—an innocent victim of mob hysteria." He again charged his listeners with avoiding the hypocrisy of commemorating the victims of the past while failing to build a movement to address the present. We must pay homage, he said, "to all those who continued to fight, even after they saw the bodies swinging from trees. But there are all kinds of things swinging in the air today"—hunger, police violence, and the hundreds of thousands of deaths each year linked to poverty-related causes. He was interrupted six times by standing ovations, and the crowd was on its feet and applauding long after he'd stopped speaking.

As he walked off the stage, I detected, just for a moment, a rare note of fatigue. Barber is, it occurred to me, relentless, not tireless; determined, not indefatigable. He is driven by a fugitive hope that an ancestral breach might finally be cemented. Backstage, organizers praised him for the speech, but he didn't linger. He had a nine-hour drive ahead of him, to North Carolina, where he would tend to his church and, after a brief respite, head out on the road again. ♦



 ILLUSTRATION BY SÉBASTIEN PLASSARD

FICTION

WITHOUT INSPECTION

By Edwidge Danticat

It took Arnold six and a half seconds to fall five hundred feet. During that time, an image of his son, Paris, flashed before his eyes: Paris, dressed in his red school-uniform shirt and khakis the day of his kindergarten graduation. That morning, Paris's mother, Darline, had skipped around the apartment changing dresses, as if she were the one graduating. Closing his eyes tightly as the hot wind he was plunging through battered his face, Arnold saw Paris at the classroom ceremony. He saw himself, too, standing next to Darline, who had finally chosen a billowing sapphire-colored satin dress. He was in the one black suit he wore to everything, to weddings and to funerals.

One reason not to own too many things was their crammed two-bedroom apartment, but the other, at least for him, had to do with never wanting to feel bound. To be attached to a few people was fine—to Paris and to Darline, who were as much a part of him as his blood was—but he never wanted to be tied to things, to clothes and shoes gathering dust in packed closets, to a fancy car that required hefty payments every month. No, it was simpler to be free. As free as this fall, which he had neither intended nor chosen, this dive that had resulted from his left foot slipping off the scaffold and his body sliding out of his either loosened or broken safety harness, as though a wrathful hand had pulled the straps off him, tipped him on his side, and tossed him into the air. Then his body, attempting to regain some control, had corrected the angle at which he had begun falling, so that he was now plummeting head first toward the ground, which was not yet concrete but dirt and soil, from which weeds, bushes, and flowers had been plucked to make way for a forty-eight-story hotel.

He was still falling, faster by the second. The wind felt increasingly resistant, each gust a hard blue veil to pierce through, even as the ground rose to meet him. His body veered farther left and directly below him was an open cement-mixer chute, attached to a truck, the kind that had always looked like a spaceship to him.

He'd been looking down at the cement truck a few hours earlier, as he sat on the scaffold platform eating his breakfast. Darline liked him to eat at home with her and Paris, but he was always in too much of a hurry to do it, except on the rare Saturdays and Sundays when neither of them had to work. During the week, he drove her to the Haitian restaurant where she was a cook, then he dropped Paris off at school. By the time he got to the construction site, he had only a few minutes to buy a guava pastry and a cup of coffee from the Lopez brothers' food truck.

What enterprising guys the Lopez brothers were. Only five years earlier, they'd arrived from Cojimar on a raft made from a refitted nineteen-fifties Chevy, and look at them now. The Lopez brothers' raft story, which he'd once heard them tell to another Cuban, while he was waiting for his breakfast, had reminded him of his own landing, which was, oh, so different from theirs.

Darline had been the only person sitting on the beach in the predawn light the morning that he, nine other men, and four women were ditched in the middle of the sea and told by the captain to swim ashore. The sea was relatively calm that morning. As Arnold got closer to the beach, he became aware of the towering buildings behind her.

All four women had drowned. They could not swim. Their bodies might eventually wash up on the beach, just as his did, except that he was still alive. Some of the men who had been on the boat with him were alive, too. They lay on the beach and tried to convince themselves, by digging their heels and toes into the sand, that they were no longer moving. He, on the other hand, just sat there looking at her. He did not want to walk over to her and frighten her away. He stank, and he was certain that the patchy beard he'd grown on the trip made him look menacing. She was staring back at him. Then he heard the sirens and he began pleading.

"*Ede m*"—"Help me"—he mouthed. He did not want to be detained or returned. He wanted to stay. He *needed* to stay, and he was hoping to stay with her. She could have been anybody—whoever happened to be on the beach that morning and was willing to help him. But he was happy that it was her. Somehow, it felt as though they had a rendezvous, planned by someone neither of them knew.

The sirens jolted her and she got up and came over and took his arm, so that if the police did arrive as they were walking away together they might both be arrested or both be ignored, but whatever happened to one would surely happen to the other—because to anyone who was looking at them they appeared to be a couple, one of whom was soaking wet.

As they walked toward the parking lot, leaving the other men, still dazed and baffled behind them, he heard a few of them shout out to her, but she did not look back. He followed her lead and didn't look back, either, even as some of them called his name.

One of the men yelled, "Your wife was waiting here for you, huh?"

Another, "Please don't leave us here."

Two of them tried to follow, but quickly gave up. Darline was walking too fast, and the men were tired. He, too, would have been trailing behind

if she were not supporting him. She leaned in and said quietly, "*An n ale, an n ale*"—"Let's go"—and sped up.

Her small white car was covered with dents and scratches. He forgot that he was wet until she passed him the towel she'd been sitting on at the beach. He shook the sand off it before placing it on the front passenger seat.

"If you'd stayed, they would have taken you to Krome," she said.

He had no idea what or where Krome was.

"It's a prison for people like us," she said.

Us? What did she mean by *us*? Was this her way of telling him that she'd also come by boat? Had she been imprisoned in this place, Krome?

He wanted to ask her a dozen questions. He wanted to know why she had chosen him. Why rescue him and not the others? At least three more could have fit into the back seat of her car. But, more than curious, he was thirsty. So very thirsty. Just as he was now, as he was falling.

He'd learned, while at sea, that time can stretch endlessly and that wind and air can suck you dry, forcing you to see what is not there. They had run out of clean water halfway through the trip from Port-de-Paix, on the northern coast of Haiti, and had had to drink seawater or their own urine. A trip that was supposed to take at most two days had actually taken four, because the captain kept changing course, and once even changed speedboats, to avoid run-ins with the U.S. Coast Guard.

Before he could ask for water, she reached into the back seat and handed him a bottle from a pack of more than a dozen. If the police hadn't arrived, with their helicopters, cruisers, ambulances, and dogs, he might have taken some of that water to the people he'd left behind on the beach.

The police dogs he heard barking, she told him, were cadaver dogs. They were released on the beach to find corpses that might be hidden from view, because for every person who made it to shore maybe five others died. Why hadn't he dived back into the sea to rescue the others? Or at least drag some of the corpses out? His own hunger and thirst, the weakness in his legs, had made him fear drowning if he went in again; his fear of being caught had made him crazy, or selfish.

He drank the water so fast it nearly choked him. She took the empty bottle and handed him another full one. He drank that, too.

"Where should I take you?" she asked him.

This was a service she provided, he realized. She was a volunteer chauffeur of boat people. Later, she would tell him that she'd done this for seventeen others, including women and children.

He now felt doubly sorry for the people he'd left behind, men and women he'd barely known when they embarked in Port-de-Paix, but with whom he'd grown familiar during the journey, as they'd watched one another become both homesick and seasick, shrinking to sunburned skin and protruding bones overnight. These other survivors would now have to confront their grief *and* the immigration police. Most, if not all of them, would be sent back. She had saved him from that.

"*Ou grangou*?" she asked him, once the water she gave him had diluted all the salt water in his stomach.

Before he could answer, she pulled over into a fast-food drive-through and ordered him two bags of food. Although it was the first food he had eaten in this country, he would never again enjoy breakfast burritos. He ate six of them, and then he threw up in the rest room of the fast-food place.

After he had cleaned himself up, they sat in her car in the parking lot, trying to figure out what to do next.

"I never take anyone to my home with me," she told him.

He hoped that this meant she was making an exception, because, now that he had eaten and was no longer thirsty, he looked her over carefully and found her body, which was both long and shapely, as pleasing as her face.

"There's a shelter . . ." She started driving again without finishing her sentence.

She took him to a church shelter where he met some men like him, men who'd come on boats from Haiti, the Bahamas, and Cuba. He'd learned Spanish from the Dominicans he'd worked for as a stock boy on the northern Haitian border, and picked up some turns of phrase and idioms from the shelter Cubans, who helped him get the job on the construction site.

A few days after she left him at the shelter, he was playing dominoes with his new friends, while also watching a television perched against a back wall in the recreation room, when he saw a news story about a boat that had capsized in the waters near Turks and Caicos. Twelve bodies had been found: seven men, five women. Ten more were still missing.

He thought he would never see her again, but she came by the shelter soon after he started working. They went out into the yard, where there was a set of rusty swings. The swings reminded him that children could also stay at this shelter, but, thankfully, there were none there now. Across from the swings was a basketball court, with a mural of adults and children playing in a tropical forest filled with coconut palms. They stood together by the swings.

"I have a son," she told him. "His father died at sea."

For a moment, he thought that she and the boy's father had been separated before this man died in the sea. But, as her eyes filled with tears, he realized that she had been at sea with him. And that she had watched him drown the way those who'd come with Arnold had drowned.

"How did you make it?" he asked her.

"I had to pull our son out of the water," she said.

"What's your son's name?" he asked.

"Paris," she said, and, before he could respond, she added, "It was his father's dream to go there one day."

He then imagined the boy's father, a young man like himself, not just fleeing misery but answering the siren call of a distant city, where he felt he belonged. Arnold had been imagining a life in Miami since he was a boy. Many people he knew in Port-de-Paix had gone to the Bahamas by boat, and a few had moved from there to Miami. He'd felt as urgent a longing for Miami as Paris's father must have felt for the French capital.

What he had not foreseen about Miami, though, was the plethora of

stories like his. He had also not realized that there would be homeless families sleeping under a bridge a few feet from the luxury hotel that he was helping to erect. The poor dead children he heard about in the news were also a shock to him, the ones who were randomly gunned down by the police or by one another, in schools, in their homes, while walking in the street, or playing in city parks.

It started drizzling in the yard with the swings. He thought that Darline would run inside and was ready to follow her, but she didn't move.

"Where's your son now?" he asked.

"I have a friend from work who has a boy like him and she sometimes watches him for me. We take turns."

By "a boy like him," did she mean a fatherless boy, a sea-orphaned boy? Or did her child suffer from some type of infirmity?

"Is he sick?" he asked.

"He was the first one to fall in the water," she said. "It may have done something to his head."

She was laying out all her life's complications for him to consider. She was telling him that he could either go or stay. He wanted to stay.

She squeezed her body into a swing and tried to force it to move. He listened as the metal chains squeaked above her. She pushed herself back and forth a few times, then dug her shoes into the dirt to stop. When her feet were firmly on the ground, he leaned over and kissed her.

They went inside, and he asked her to wait in the dim, narrow hallway while he went to the room he shared with three other men and made her son a paper airplane. This was the only kind of toy he'd had when he was a boy. Whenever he found pieces of paper in the trash or on the ground, he'd make himself a paper airplane. Eventually, he had become an expert at it. The first paper airplane he made for Paris was plain white and unadorned, but it had long, narrow wings so it could fly far.

She had a habit of making lists in a small notebook. Lists of things she needed to do for the day, lists of the people she'd taken to shelters from the beach, even though she hadn't gone there since rescuing him. The Coast Guard had become more vigilant and the landings had decreased.

One day she read him something from the notebook. His name was the only one on a list she titled "People from the Beach I Have Kissed."

He took the opportunity to ask her why she'd kept going back to that beach after her husband had drowned there.

She always called for help for those who were drowning, she said, just as she had the day Arnold arrived. She never jumped into the water to save anyone, because she didn't think she'd be able to stay afloat. Besides, a desperate person can use your head as a step stool to climb out of the waves and she had her son to think about. She kept coming back to the beach because it was her husband's burial place, and her own. The person she'd been when the three of them, she and her husband and her son, had got on that boat and left Haiti—that person was also lost at sea.

This landing was even more abrupt than his last one. His free fall ended as his body slammed into the drum of the cement mixer. He was being tossed inside a dark blender full of grout. Every few seconds, his face would emerge from under the wet, pounded sand and pebbles, and he would keep his mouth closed, trying to force air out through his nose and push away the grainy mix that his body was trying to inhale.

He pretended that he was swimming and tried to flutter-kick, just as he had when the speedboat stopped in the middle of the ocean and he was told to swim ashore. He attempted arm strokes, but couldn't move either his arms or his

EATING GRAPES DOWNWARD

Every morning without thinking I open
my notebook and see if something
might have grown in me during the night.
Usually, no. But sometimes a tendril
tries a crack in my consciousness
and if I remain only indirectly aware of it
and tether my attention to the imminent
and perhaps ultimately unseeable
sun, sometimes it will grow. Inevitably
a sense of insignificance intrudes: I think
of all the lives in all the places
waiting in their ways
for something to grow out of them,
into them. Is it the same God?

I have a cousin whose political opinions
vile up out of him on the Internet
in the most imaginative ways.
He sports a cartoon mustache like Rollie Fingers
that was a lodestone of enduring awe
in my childhood, along with his gift
for scissoring bricks with one blow.
With his spanking *karategi* and cowboy *kiai*,
his weasel-sleek of hair and handlebars,
he was a spectacle there in Midland, Texas,
circa 1973, where the sun slammed
the blacktop and the pump jacks beaked
the background like prehistoric crows.

Always eat grapes downward,
advises Samuel Butler, a corroded copy

of whose "Note-books" I perused
at the backwoods Woodbridge bookstore
that seemed, somehow, already erstwhile,
while my daughters fussed and bleated to be
outside with the miniature cow Mona,
so named because her moo was like a moan.
Savor the best grapes first, Butler means,
so there will be none better on the bunch,
and each will seem delicious to the last.
In truth, I don't quite follow the logic,
though his conclusion—past fifty,
everyone eats their days downward—
is unassailable.

What else?
That people who can whistle their speech.
My terminal confusion of *preterite* and *predicate*.
The meanings we live but cannot have.
Oh, and Mona, who seemed less cow
than concept, really, half animal, half irony,
sticking her rubbable muzzle
through the fence like a Labrador.
We stayed a long while petting the impossibility of her.
We gave her—if you can believe it—grapes
left over from our lunch,
and when they were gone, and we were almost,
her moo blued the air like a sorrow
so absurd it left nothing left of us
but laughter.

—*Christian Wiman*

legs. Still, his body was in constant motion, because the mixer continued to turn. He reached for the shaft, what in a more stable space, in a house or a temple or some other holy place, you might call a *poto mitan*, a middle pillar. He used what was left of his strength to propel his body toward the shaft and wrap his hands around it. He was able to hold on only briefly before he was pulled in another direction.

He felt lighter now, even lighter than he had when falling. His bones were melting, his blood evaporating, and he was now like parchment or something porous—tulle, or the white eyelet lace Darline adored. He had not been paying attention to the alternating hum and jangle of the mixer. He hadn't noticed that there were streaks of blood polluting the cement, or that he was feeling no pain. Then the mixer stopped spinning and he heard the stillness, which was soon replaced by screams and grunts and "Oh, my God"s. Then he heard the sirens, which took him back to the beach, to the gray sand and Darline's sable face, her indigo jogging suit, Paris's red shirt, and his own orange-and-green-speckled vomit at the fast-food place.

From where he was lying inside the cement mixer, he saw an airplane cut across the clear blue sky. And that was when he realized that he was dying, and that his dying offered him a kind of freedom he'd never had before. Whatever he thought about he could see in front of him. Whatever he wanted he could have, except what he wanted most of all, which was not to die. He had wished for something with wings to pluck him out of the cement mixer, and there it was up in the sky now, in the shape of an airplane. He and Darline had been putting money away to take Paris on an airplane. It was either a trip or a ring, and they were essentially already married, Darline had told him. Paris was their ring. They loved each other and they loved him. He was their son.

He wanted to see Darline and Paris again. If only one last time. He wanted to see their faces. He wanted to hold their hands. He wanted to kiss them in the different ways he often had, her on the lips and him on top of his head, where his fontanel would be if he were still a baby.

The plane was slipping out of view, and he heard himself whisper, "*Rete la*"—"Wait"—"*Quédate*." He meant to tell the airplane to stay, or Darline and Paris to stay in his mind, but the fat pink face of his foreman was blocking the sky and he heard the usually gruff man say, "Don't worry, Fernandez. I'm not going anywhere. Help is on the way, bud."

Oh, yes, the papers he'd used to get the job said that he was Ernesto Fernandez from Santiago de Cuba. No one on the site, not even the other Haitians, knew his real name. They didn't believe he was "Cuban Cuban," as they'd said, but since he spoke Spanish they thought he'd spent some time there and had taken the name.

He did not know how long this half-consciousness would last, his being able to think and remember, so he wanted to keep pushing, to see how far he could take it. What if he made himself float out of the cement mixer? What if he travelled through the city and visited the only two people he loved? He wanted them to see him or, if they could not see him, sense him. He wasn't sure how this would work. Maybe they would feel a hot wind or a cold breeze. Maybe something near them would move. A picture frame might slip, a drinking glass shatter. Might they notice his shadow out of the corner of their eye, sniff for his pungent after-work smell, or hear his favorite song? Would their palms itch? Would they feel the flutter of his kisses? Or would he appear in their dreams?

Paris might be more susceptible to receiving signs from him. The boy was already "touched." His mind had been

partly lost somewhere between the sea and the beach.

Arnold felt the time growing shorter, so he would not be going all the way back to his childhood in Port-de-Paix. It was a time he'd been trying to forget anyway. He had never met his parents, never knew who they were. He had been raised as a child servant in a household, given away by whoever had brought him into the world. He knew only that he shared neither blood nor a surname with the woman in whose house he grew up. Nor did he have any biological link to her two sons, whose clothes he washed and ironed, whom he walked to school and cooked for, even though they were a few years older than him. Maybe his parents were dead. The woman who raised him had never mentioned them, except to say, whenever he messed up her food or didn't clean her house properly, that he was worthless and didn't deserve to have parents.

He had escaped her and her sons as soon as he could, moving to the border, where he slept in a warehouse from which he hauled bags of flour, sugar, and rice to Haitian venders and merchants. It was one of those merchants who had told him about a boat leaving for Miami. Her brother was the captain, she said. He gave her all the money he'd been saving up so that he could go back and show his cruel owner and her sons that he'd made something of himself.

After he moved in with Darline, he learned, when she took him to a free immigration clinic in North Miami, that she was still waiting for her papers. She had just completed her baccalaureate in Haiti when she became pregnant with Paris. Paris's father had been her classmate in Latibonit and they shared, as she put it, an impractical love. She loved her family. She loved her country. She wanted to stay in Latibonit. She wanted to grow old and die there. She and Paris's father had sufficient resources from their families to get by. But, when Paris's father told her that he was leaving for Miami on a boat, there was no question of her and Paris staying behind.

"It was crazy," she told Arnold. "I thought I couldn't live without him. I thought I'd stop breathing if he wasn't near me. Especially after we'd made this baby together."

When they got to Miami, only she and Paris made it out of the water. Her husband's body was never found. After a short hospital stay, they were sent to a women's shelter. The lawyer at the immigration clinic called it "humanitarian parole." The same lawyer told Arnold that he had entered the country "without inspection." That is, he had not gone before any immigration official the day he arrived in the United States, which meant that, technically, he wasn't even here.

"I want to see Darline," Arnold told himself. He now had a better sense of how this might work. What he didn't know was whether or not there were limits to the wishes he could be granted.

Suddenly, he was standing in the kitchen of the restaurant in Little Haiti where Darline worked. The room was small and steamy, the walls grease-stained. She was cooking a large pot of cornmeal with red beans. Next to that was an equally large pot of stewed codfish. He had been in the kitchen so many times that perhaps he was just remembering it. She was perspiring so much that it was hard for him to imagine that she could last a whole day there. She took a swig from a bottle of water, then raised the lid of a pot of boiling plantains. As she worked, she hummed a song that he began to hum, too. Maybe she would feel him humming along. Maybe she would even hear him.

"Latibonit O" was the only song he had ever heard her sing. She sang it so often that she didn't realize she was doing it. She sang it when she was happy, when she was worried, when she was sad. She started to sing it now.

Latibonit o, yo voye pale m, yo di m Sole malad . . .

The song, he believed, was about a sick sun looming over the town where she was born. He sang along to the part where the sun becomes bedridden, then dies and is buried. The song had always been, in his mind, a solemn farewell to the golden hour before sunset. He didn't know what the sunsets over Latibonit looked like, but Port-de-Paix had the most beautiful sunsets, muted just enough not to blind you when you looked directly at the horizon. He now missed how time had seemed to stand still at those moments, if only for the duration of a single post-dusk breath.

He sang along as loudly as he could, but he could not produce audible sounds. This, he discovered, was one of his limitations. He heard a buzz coming from Darline's apron, a familiar vibration. It was her cell phone.

Whatever she heard after she said hello annoyed her. She dropped the wooden spoon she was using to gently move the boiling plantains around. She sucked her teeth in exasperation, and it sounded as though she were whistling through them.

Her friend Oula came in with several orders. Darline looked so distracted that Oula asked, "*Sa k genyen*, Darline?"

"It's Paris," she said.

"That teacher bothering you about him again?" True to her name, Oula was always there when Darline needed her. Oula also had a son who teachers thought was slow.

He did not know how long he had, so he said Paris's name and hoped that it would be interpreted as a desire to see the boy.

It was morning recess at Paris's school. Paris was sitting alone in a corner between two bookshelves, making boats out of some sheets of paper that the teacher had given him. Arnold and Paris had gone from making paper airplanes together to making boats. This activity helped Paris focus, but it also helped Arnold. The boats reminded him that he had survived the sea.

The other children were eating their snacks and chasing one another around the classroom, as the teacher threatened them with time-outs and other forms of deprivation. Paris did not even look up to observe the commotion. The principal of the school had wanted to put Paris in a special class, but Darline had refused. He was not disruptive, just overly engrossed in certain things, Darline had told the principal and anyone else who wanted to label her son anything but shy.

Arnold knew childhood stigma too well not to agree with Darline. Paris's teachers could not understand what the boy had been through. They did not know that his father had disap-

peared just a few feet from him. Paris seemed to be in perpetual mourning, like his mother.

Paris had called Arnold Papa the first time they met. Darline had arranged for them to have a meal together after hours at the restaurant where she worked. Paris had said nothing during the meal, but, as Arnold was leaving, he asked, "Are you my papa?"

"I could be," Arnold said.

Darline smiled, and Paris jumped into his arms. Both seemed to take his answer as a gift he was offering. Suddenly his life meant something. He became a father.

In Paris's classroom, Arnold crouched down next to the boy, in the narrow space between the bookshelves. He tried to wrap his arms around Paris but could no more feel the boy's body than the boy could feel his.

He moved his head close to Paris's and pressed his mouth against the boy's right ear and shouted so that he might possibly be heard: "Paris, my son, one day you will go to the other Paris. You will have a family and you will fly in a real airplane."

He looked for a sign that the boy had heard him or even felt his presence, but he saw none. Paris was now on his eighth paper boat. He was folding lengthwise, then at the corners. There was always a moment in their boat-making when Arnold thought that Paris might be content to stop at what looked like a hat, but then he continued until a stern or a hull emerged.

"Goodbye, Paris," he shouted into the boy's ear. "Please love your mother forever."

Then he smiled as the boy reached up and flicked the ear he was shouting into, as though something small, like a buzzing mosquito, had grazed him there.

Paris disappeared. Or maybe it was Arnold who'd disappeared.

He was back at the construction site. Not wounded but whole, just as he had been when he left home that morning. He was still wearing his bright-orange overalls and matching hard hat. Was time playing with him, or was he playing with time? Was he skirting the yellow police tape in the present or in the past?

The site was closed down and many of the men he worked with were milling around, leaning over the tape to better see the photographers who were taking pictures of the cement mixer. News trucks with extended antennas were lined up across the street and reporters were interviewing both his co-workers and a few passersby, some of whom claimed that they had seen him fall. His body had flailed wildly at first, they said, then plunged directly into the cement chute.

The construction company and the developer had already issued a statement, which was read by many of the reporters for their midday broadcasts: "We are deeply saddened by the tragic death of Ernesto Fernandez. We offer our condolences to his family, his friends, and his co-workers. We are working with state and federal investigators to find out how this unfortunate accident took place and to prevent further incidents of this nature in the future."

There were cell-phone videos of him falling, taken from different angles. Some people had filmed him from the ground. Others had recorded him from their terraces and balconies. He looked, in the quickly assembled collage of these recordings, not like a person but like a large object plummeting. He was moving too fast to be identifiable as a human being when the footage wasn't in slow motion.

The lightness returned. That airless sensation of his body evaporating. Darline and Paris were fading, too. They were becoming distant longings, silhouettes, shadows fading on the ground.

There are loves that outlive lovers. Some version of these words had been his prayer as he fell. Darline would now have two of those. He would also have two: Darline and Paris. He would keep trying to look for them. He would continue to hum along with Darline's song, and keep whispering in Paris's ear. He would also try to guide Darline back to the beach, to look for others like him. ♦



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NEWYORKER.COM
Edwidge Danticat on the Caribbean immigrant experience.

THE CRITICS

BOOKS

SURVIVOR BIAS

Nearly a century after it was written, Zora Neale Hurston's book about a former slave comes to print.

By Casey N. Cep

Captain William Foster left Mobile in secret and returned the same way. On July 8, 1860, he dropped anchor in the waters off the coast of Mississippi, hid his cargo below deck, slipped ashore, and travelled overland to fetch a tugboat from Alabama. By then, Foster and his ship had survived a hurricane, a mutiny, an ambush, and a transatlantic journey, but late that Sunday night, after the tug carried him up the Mobile River to Twelve Mile Island, the Captain emptied his hold, dismissed his crew, and set fire to his ship. The Clotilda, Foster would forever after complain, was worth more than his share of what it had smuggled.

Although the international slave trade had been outlawed in America more than half a century earlier, Foster and three co-conspirators, a trio of brothers by the name of Meaher, had purchased a hundred and twenty-five men, women, and children, from Benin and Nigeria, to traffic them into the United States. The plan had been hatched a year before, when one of the Meahers got into an argument: a New Yorker insisted that slaves could no longer be transported across the Atlantic, a Louisiana planter wagered a hundred dollars that it could be done, and Timothy Meaher bet a thousand that he could be the one to do it.

The market for slaves had grown tremendously in the previous five decades. Absent imports, slavers relied on reproduction and relocation for their supply, and, as labor-intensive agriculture shifted to the Deep South, more than a million enslaved people were forced there by ship, rail, and sometimes by foot, in coffles. By the middle of the nineteenth century, domestic slave prices were so high that many planters had begun lobbying to reopen the global trade.

Among them were the Meahers, who had moved from Maine to Alabama, where they owned sawmills, steamboats, plantations, and people. To increase their holdings and win the bet, they recruited Foster, a Nova Scotian shipbuilder, and chose the Clotilda from among his ships. Although the schooner was fast enough to evade capture, it had to be refitted as a slave ship, with a false deck to conceal the necessary barrels of water, rice, beef, pork, sugar, flour, bread, molasses, and rum. Foster sailed from Mobile Bay with papers that claimed he was delivering lumber to St. Thomas, and eleven crew members who had not been told of their real mission. The nine thousand dollars in gold stashed on board to pay for the slaves played havoc with the ship's compass, taking it off course; after that, a hurricane caught it just north of Bermuda. While repairing the ship, Foster's men discovered the hidden deck, and threatened to alert the authorities.

Captain and crew negotiated a compromise, and reached Ouidah, on the west coast of Africa, a few weeks later. After eight days of discussion, Foster traded his rum and gold for more than a hundred slaves from the barracoons, as the holding pens were called. He loaded them onto his ship, and crossed the Atlantic in forty-five days. An estimated two million Africans died in the Middle Passage during the slave trade, but all the men and women on the Clotilda made it to Alabama alive. Neither the Meahers nor Foster were ever convicted of any crime, and, after five years of slavery, the survivors of the last transatlantic run were liberated by the Union Army. Free, but unable to raise the funds to return to Africa, many of them banded together to form Africatown, a settlement of their own just outside Mobile.

In the subsequent years and decades, the survivors of the Clotilda gradually died, until only one man answered the door in Africatown when a student from Barnard College came knocking, in 1927. The survivor's name was Kossola; the student's name was Zora Neale Hurston. Their first visit went badly, but Hurston wrote an article about Kossola's life for the *Journal of Negro History* anyway. After that false start, she returned to Alabama several times to talk with Kossola, trying to learn, in her own words, "who you are and how you came to be a slave; and to what part of Africa do you belong, and how you fared as a slave, and how you have managed as a free man."

Hurston spent four years turning what Kossola shared with her into a longer work of nonfiction, but no publisher wanted the resulting book—not then, not when the publication of "Jonah's Gourd Vine," in 1934, made her a celebrated novelist, and not even posthumously, after "Their Eyes Were Watching God" had sold more than a million copies. Hurston's manuscript languished for nearly nine decades. Now HarperCollins has published "Barracoon: The Story of the Last 'Black



CARL VAN VECHTEN TRUST/BEINECKE LIBRARY, YALE; OPPOSITE: JOOST SWARTE

The literature on the African slave trade, Hurston wrote, had endless "words from the seller, but not one word from the sold."

PHOTOGRAPH BY CARL VAN VECHTEN

Cargo.'" Why it was rejected in Hurston's lifetime, and how the residents of Africatown faded from her history and our own, is a story almost as plaintive as the one the book itself records.

Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes were undergraduates when they ran into each other on the streets of Mobile, in the summer of 1927. Hurston was thirty-six, but still a semester shy of becoming the first black graduate of Barnard College; she was down below the Mason-Dixon Line to collect folklore and oral histories for the American Folklore Society and for the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. She had been sent to tour Fort Mose, a black settlement founded by runaway slaves in Florida, and to talk with Kossola, but hadn't got enough material "to make a flea a waltzing jacket." Hughes was twenty-five and between semesters at Lincoln University, in Pennsylvania; he had gone South to read his poetry at Fisk University and at the Tuskegee Institute. Although Hughes and Hurston had crossed paths a few times in New York, they met in Alabama entirely by chance: when he got off the train at the M. & O. Railroad Terminal, Hurston happened to be walking down the street.



They went to lunch, then Hurston offered Hughes a ride home. Driving a Nash that she called Sassy Susie and carrying a chrome-plated pistol in her suitcase, Hurston was formidable even in her failures. She'd made a disastrous marriage two months earlier. Now, with her scanty research, she was courting the wrath of the professor who had arranged her travels: the renowned anthropologist Franz Boas. It was her "Barnardese," Hurston said, that was alienating would-be subjects like Kossola. Hurston was born in the tiny Alabama town of Notasulga, and brought up in the all-black Florida town of Eatonville, which, like Africatown, was founded by former slaves in the years after the Civil War. But she no longer sounded like the daughter of a sharecropper turned Baptist preacher, much less like someone who had once earned her living as a waitress, a manicurist, and a maid. Her airs, she feared, were not only put-on but off-putting. Still, never one to acquiesce to circumstances, she cadged what she could from the records of the Mobile Historical Society to embellish what little Kossola had told her, and headed north with Hughes.

The two writers took the long way home, stopping to talk with conjurers, tramps, convicts, and backwoods preachers all over the South. Harlem Romantics, their Lake District was Dixie, and their lyrical ballads were the songs, stories, and tales they gathered—Hurston compiling transcripts for her academic work, Hughes jotting down phrases in his notebook. He didn't have a license, so Hurston drove: from Mobile to Montgomery, from there to Tuskegee to meet with students, and then to Georgia, where they encountered Bessie Smith in Macon and toured the plantation where Jean Toomer gathered his material for "Cane." They stopped on the way to South Carolina to meet with a root doctor, got a flat tire in Columbia, and then scooted up the coast. By September, they had returned to New York, where Hurston settled down to write her article on Kossola, who was then known mainly by his American name, Cudjo Lewis.

Most of what Hurston published in "Cudjo's Own Story of the Last African Slaver" was cribbed from other people who had interviewed him; by one biographer's count, forty-nine of the essay's sixty-seven paragraphs were plagiarized, the bulk of them from Emma Langdon Roche's "Historic Sketches of the Old South." Not many noticed the transgression, least of all the wealthy white widow Charlotte Osgood Mason, a financial backer of Hughes, Alain Locke, and other Harlem Renaissance artists, who decided to offer Hurston a camera, a car, and two hundred dollars a month to collect more oral histories and folk stories down South.

Papa Franz, as Hurston called her supervisor, and Godmother, as she would come to call her patron, were impressed by how much she learned on her subsequent trips to Africatown. With each visit, she became less hurried, and Kossola grew more forthcoming. She brought him gifts—Georgia peaches, a Virginia ham, Bee Brand insect powder to ward off mosquitoes—and he allowed her to take pictures of him in his family cemetery and to make a short film of him chopping firewood. With Mason paying her salary, Hurston could take her time, coming and going as Kossola wanted, meeting his grandchildren, visiting his family's graves, going with him to the church where he was sexton, and, in between, honoring the days he did not want to speak of his life in slavery, or of anything else.

When Hurston finally started writing, she dedicated "Barracoon" not to its subject but to Mason, and acknowledged in its preface what her earlier article had buried in a footnote—namely, her debt "to the records of the Mobile Historical Society." In the introduction, she sketched the history of the Clotilda and the geography and the economics of the brutal trade that had ripped Kossola from his home. "Of all the millions transported from Africa to the Americas only one man is left," she wrote—a man whose voice was crucial because the burgeoning body of literature on the African slave trade contained endless "words from the seller, but not one word from the sold."

Hurston framed Kossola's testimony as the last opportunity to reduce that deficit, and the twelve chapters that follow her introduction consist almost entirely of his words. She renders Kossola's story as he told it, not only linguistically, in his dialect, but narratively, in his own wandering way—sending readers into sad silences and on distracted errands of the sort she'd shared with him, closing the garden gate on them the way he'd closed it on her. "Barracoon" does not so much shape Kossola's story as transcribe it.

Kossola was only nineteen when the Army of Dahomey raided his inland village of Bantè, beheading his king and countless others, and kidnapping for the slave trade anyone who wasn't elderly or injured. "I see de people gittee kill so fast! De old ones dey try run 'way from de house but dey dead by de door, and de women soldiers got dey head," he told Hurston,

before recalling the way the heads of his neighbors came to smell days after their decapitation. That stench followed him all the way to Abomey, where the palace was decorated with skulls and guards carried pikes topped with bleached bones. It was at Abomey that Kossola and the other prisoners were allowed to rest before being marched another sixty miles to Ouidah.

One of the great virtues of Hurston's book is that it returns the wound of slavery, even in her time considerably calloused over on this country's consciousness, to its raw and bloody state. Kossola could recall with great specificity the actions of Captain Foster, who tore him away from the African continent and made him into an American slave: "De white man lookee and lookee. He lookee hard at de skin and de feet and de legs and in de mouth. Den he choose." Kossola recalled the horror of separation, first from his tribal family in Bantè, then from his companions in the barracoon. "Den we cry," he said, "we sad 'cause we doan want to leave the rest of our people in de barracoon. We all lonesome for our home. We doan know whut goin' become of us."

Foster's prisoners were loaded onto the Clotilda, shaved, stripped naked, and locked in darkness below deck for twelve days. On the thirteenth day, they were allowed into the light, and men and women who had never before seen the ocean could suddenly see nothing else. "I so skeered on de sea," Kossola recalled. "De water it makee so much noise! It growl lak de thousand beastes in de bush." Whenever other ships approached, the captives were hustled back into the hold, hidden from the American, British, Portuguese, and Spanish patrols enforcing the prohibitions on the slave trade.

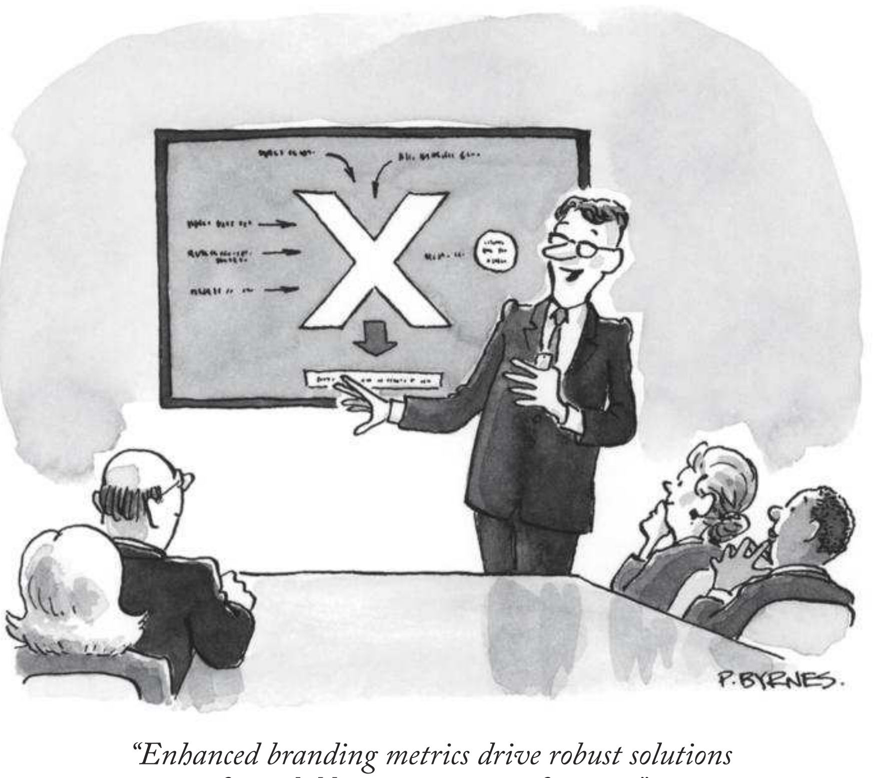
In Alabama, the Africans were unloaded and spirited off to another boat for the trip to a plantation upriver. Captain Foster refused to pay his crew the double wages he had promised them under the threat of mutiny, and the seamen were hurried North to prevent them from revealing the slaves' whereabouts to the authorities. But the Africans were already the talk of Mobile, and a few days after their arrival they had to be moved again so that federal officials could not seize them. Once the proverbial and actual coasts were clear, the Africans were divided among the men who had planned the transatlantic run.

"Cap'n Jim he took me," Kossola said of James Meaher, who started calling the teen-ager Cudjo, and put him to work on a steamship, chopping wood to fuel its trips from Mobile to Montgomery. He labored that way, gruellingly and without pay, for five years and six months. Finally, on April 12, 1865, Union soldiers picking mulberries along the shoreline saw Kossola and the other slaves on Meaher's steamboat and hollered a message at them: "You free, you doan b'long to nobody no mo'."

Sixty-two years later, when Hurston met Kossola, many other men and women liberated by the war were still alive. Not long after she recorded Kossola's story, she and other writers with the Works Progress Administration's Federal Writers' Project dispersed around the South, compiling the stories that would fill the seventeen volumes of "Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States." Almost all of those stories progressed from captivity to emancipation, but Kossola's account both began and ended in freedom: even in the final years of his life, he considered himself more African than American, and he could remember clearly an earlier, unquestioned liberty in his homeland.

He could not, however, return to it. Emancipation freed slaves only from bondage, not from destitution; the Clotilda survivors had no way of paying for their passage home. When they resolved, instead, to build a village of their own, it was Kossola who was tasked with asking one of their old slavers to provide the land for it, and he made a passionate speech to Timothy Meaher calling for reparations. When Meaher refused, Kossola and his former shipmates went back to work in sawmills and powder mills, on farms and railroads, and as domestic help, until they had saved enough money to buy the land that became Africatown.

Kossola moved there and married another survivor, a woman named Abile. They had six children, all of whom died in one tragedy after another—illnesses, a train accident, an unexplained disappearance, a police shooting. By the time Hurston arrived, Kossola had outlived his wife and children by almost two decades and was only a few years away from his own death. He was, Hurston wrote, "the only man on earth who has in his heart the memory of his African



"Enhanced branding metrics drive robust solutions for scalable monetization of jargon."

home; the horrors of a slave raid; the barracoon; the Lenten tones of slavery; and who has sixty-seven years of freedom in a foreign land."

"Only" and "last" are siren songs for writers, alluring but dangerous. Meaning does not always, or even often, consolidate in sole survivors—and certainly it is not absent from those who perish—yet the temptation to imbue temporal accidents with surplus significance skews many accounts of history. Kossola did not necessarily possess greater knowledge or insight or wisdom about slavery or the slave trade than those who died before him, but Hurston was drawn to him because he was known near and far as the last living survivor of the Clotilda.

As it turns out, though, even that wasn't true, and Hurston knew it. Almost a year after her adventures with Hughes in Sassy Susie, she wrote a letter to him from Alabama. "Oh!" she exclaimed toward the end, "almost forgot": she had found another survivor of the Clotilda living on the Tombigbee River, two hundred miles north of Africatown. The woman was older than Kossola, and, according to Hurston, a better storyteller. But there can't be two lasts or more than one only, so Hurston, perhaps believing that Kossola's story would be more valuable if people thought it was unique, told Hughes that she planned to keep this other survivor secret: "No one will ever know about her but us."

Tragically, that proved true. Abandoning her training by Boas, and ignoring the dictates of both honesty and history, Hurston forsook the opportunity to record the story of another survivor. Later scholars have determined that the person Hurston "almost forgot" was most likely a woman named Allie Beren, but no film footage records her face, no known photographs document her home, no oral histories capture her memories. Instead of gathering any of that, Hurston returned to New York, and spent years shaping the transcripts of her many talks with Kossola into a book. When she finally finished, no publisher wanted it. Two houses rejected it outright, while another was interested only if Hurston was willing to render Kossola's story "in language rather than dialect," which she was not.

It is true that the long vernacular passages sometimes make "Barracoon" difficult to read. Yet, in retrospect, it seems probable that the book was rejected as much for the voice that isn't in it as for the one that is. Contemporary readers who pick up "Barracoon" because it was written by Zora Neale Hurston will fail to find much of her in it. As flashy as fireworks in her own lifetime and bright as neon in ours, Hurston is barely visible in "Barracoon"; aesthetically as well as intellectually, she absents herself almost entirely from its pages. That's admirable for an anthropologist, but grievous for a stylist as talented as Hurston. The novelist who would later summon a hurricane in her fiction and suspend readers above her naked body on the altar of a hoodoo priest in her nonfiction resigned herself to the role of scribe in "Barracoon." Like Hurston herself, in those years, the book stalled out somewhere between academia and art.

Characteristically impervious to failure, Hurston responded to the rejection of her manuscript by going to work on "Jonah's Gourd Vine." With its publication, the very thing that had troubled at least one publisher about "Barracoon" became one of the most celebrated features of Hurston's fiction: her ear for black vernacular speech. Affirmed by her success, she became a more confident writer, and began giving her own voice as much expression as the voices of her subjects. When editors clamored for more, she raided her cabinets and turned her earlier field work into a book called "Mules and Men," which returns to the storytellers and singers of her childhood. A second collection of folklore, "Tell My Horse," goes gonzo into the spiritual beliefs and practices of Haiti and Jamaica. Those books have more "I"s on single pages than entire chapters of the book she wrote about Kossola. Where "Barracoon" suffers from the lack of a guide, it is clear, in these narratives, that Hurston's voice could lead the Minotaur off Crete.

What is not clear is why Hurston never returned to her earliest anthropological subject. Although she was obviously comfortable repurposing older work, she never rewrote Kossola's story, or tried again to publish it as a standalone book. In the handful of pages devoted to Africatown in her autobiography, "Dust Tracks on a Road," Hurston explains how her time with Kossola had "impressed upon me the universal nature of greed." She knew before going South that Captain Foster had purchased the Africans, but learned from Kossola that the King of Dahomey had sold them: "My own people had butchered and killed, exterminated whole nations and torn families apart, for a profit before the strangers got their chance at a cut." It's impossible to know if she abandoned "Barracoon" because of that uncomfortable fact, because of her own academic misdeeds, because of her failure to record the testimony of another survivor, or for some other reason or for none at all. The manuscript went into Hurston's archives and, for the better part of a century, stayed there.

"Lost" is as alluring an idea as "last," but what happened to "Barracoon" is more complicated than mere disappearance. The manuscript was never missing. It is mentioned by all of Hurston's biographers, including Robert Hemenway, Valerie Boyd, and Deborah G. Plant (who wrote and edited the introduction to this new publication), and Hurston's time in Africatown was detailed more than a decade ago in Sylviane A. Diouf's excellent and haunting book "Dreams of Africa in Alabama." Yet the astonishing historical confluence of one of the last African slaves in America and one of the great American writers was somehow shrugged off by posterity. When the story of Africatown is told, Hurston is not always a part of it; when her anthropological work is read, Kossola is often left out of it. Many people have watched Hurston's footage of him without knowing that she was the one behind the camera, an experience akin to reading the work of the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach and only later learning that it was translated by George Eliot.

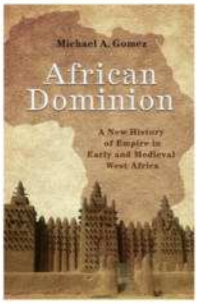
Still, if "Barracoon" was never actually lost, Hurston was. By the fifties, her writing had fallen out of favor, and when the sales stopped so did the fellowships, grants, and stipends that had supported her early work. Meanwhile, her politics, like her circumstances, grew dire—she opposed everything from the New Deal to the Supreme Court's decision in Brown v. Board of Education—until she

was estranged from the black intellectual circles that had once embraced her. She left New York after being falsely accused of molesting the son of a landlord in 1948; the trial attracted more attention than her acquittal, and those lurid headlines were among the last that she made in her lifetime. She went home to Florida, where she once again found work as a maid, while laboring tirelessly on a quixotic biography of King Herod. She died in 1960, in a county welfare home. During that time, Africatown suffered a similar decline—its founders long deceased, their descendants struggling to preserve the settlement as paper mills and oil-storage tanks staged a toxic encroachment on its borders.

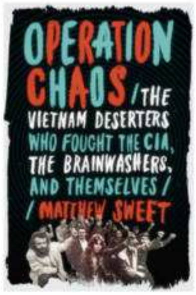
What rescued Hurston from obscurity was an act of pilgrimage not unlike the one that she had made to Kossola three decades earlier. In 1973, Alice Walker went looking for Hurston's unmarked grave. When she found it, she paid for a tombstone; more important, for generations of readers, she brought Hurston back to life. Walker offered no apologies for Hurston's dishonesty and disastrous acts of self-sabotage, but in an article that appeared in *Ms.*, "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston," she made the case for Hurston's place in the canon.

Thanks to Walker, we now have multiple editions of Hurston's novels, autobiography, and other nonfiction, including "Every Tongue Got to Confess," a posthumous collection compiled from her field notes. But "Barracoon" arrives decades late, Hurston's very first work transformed into her very last—a coda to her career, yet vital to our ongoing conversation about race and reparations. Walker has written a foreword, in which she speculates that resistance to the book over time has stemmed from what Hurston herself found shocking: Kossola's frank account of "the atrocities African peoples inflicted on each other, long before shackled Africans, traumatized, ill, disoriented, starved, arrived on ships as 'black cargo' in the hellish West." One of the virtues of "Barracoon," then, is that it may help teach us to live with uncomfortable truths, not only about the complicated and terrible story it records but also about the complicated and tremendous author who recorded it. ♦

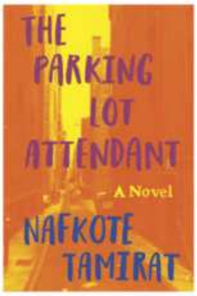
BRIEFLY NOTED



African Dominion, *by Michael A. Gomez (Princeton).* This groundbreaking study of early and medieval West Africa focusses on the rise and fall of the Kingdom of Ghana and the empires of Mali and Songhay. Reports by Arab and European travellers often contradict one another, so Gomez ingeniously synthesizes them with archeological evidence, manuscripts in Timbuktu libraries, and local tradition, to give a granular view of life in the region. The most fascinating figure is Mali's fourteenth-century ruler Mansā Mūsā, whose fame reached Europe; a Catalan illuminated map depicts him holding a massive gold nugget. Making the hajj to Mecca, he gave away such huge quantities of gold along the way that he inadvertently depressed its value for a considerable time.



Operation Chaos, *by Matthew Sweet (Holt).* A little-known chapter of the Vietnam War unfolded in 1968 in neutral Sweden, after six American deserters arrived there, having been smuggled via the Soviet Union. "It may take guts to go, but it takes balls to say no" was their controversial dictum. In this meld of history and reportage, the deserters' stories, and those of dozens of revolutionaries, hosts, and spies, coalesce into an often moving examination of loyalty and dissent. Sweet details an undercover C.I.A. mission to disrupt defection, and sheds light on the exiles' complex motives. His quest to track down all the major players in the story takes him, variously, to a maximum-security prison, a cannabis refinery, and Paris cafés.



The Parking Lot Attendant, *by Nafkote Tamirat (Holt).* This bold and original début novel begins on a mysterious island commune governed by authoritarian laws—books are banned, bedtimes strictly enforced—but mostly takes place in humdrum Boston neighborhoods. The path from suburbia to dystopia is narrated by an unnamed teen-ager with a fractured family, preternatural poise, and an appreciation for good diners. She falls under the sway of the magnetic but enigmatic leader of the city's Ethiopian community, who is secretly hatching a plan to found a new nation. Part mystery, part satire, part coming-of-age story, the novel builds toward disillusionment, as the narrator begins to realize that "the invention of new worlds is thrilling only for those who are at the forefront of the creative process."



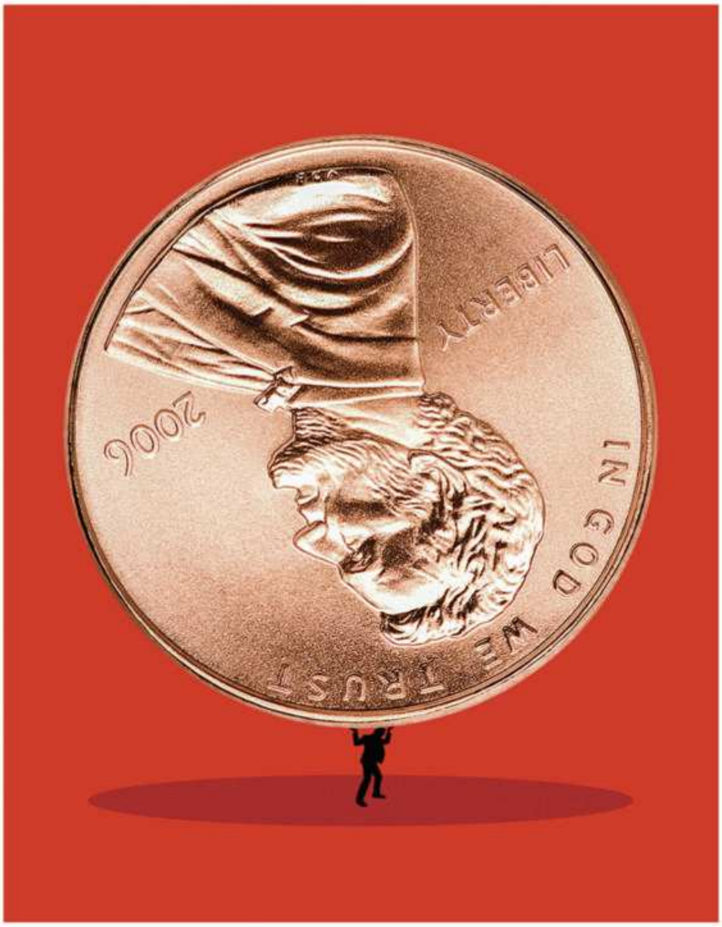
Hotel Silence, *by Auður Ava Ólafsdóttir, translated from the Icelandic by Brian FitzGibbon (Black Cat).* "About to turn forty-nine, male, divorced, heterosexual, powerless, with no sex life," Jónas Ebeneser is planning to kill himself. This taut, pithy novel follows his suicide vacation to an unspecified war-torn country. Jónas is drawn into the struggles of the traumatized locals and postpones his death in order to help rebuild the lives of others. The description of the locale is somewhat flat, but Ólafsdóttir excels in exploring what bedevils Jónas and the novel's other men: a conception of manhood that prevents them from articulating emotion or understanding power except as violence. Is it "possible to be human again after being a wild beast?" the novel asks.

BOOKS

MERCHANTS OF DOOM

Is capitalism a threat to democracy?

By Caleb Crain



A new book blames authoritarianism on politicians entranced by the free market.

ILLUSTRATION BY ALVARO DOMINGUEZ

PHOTOGRAPH: ISTOCK/GETTY

In London, in the nineteen-thirties, the émigré Hungarian intellectual Karl Polanyi was known among his friends as "the apocalyptic chap." His gloom was understandable. Nearly fifty, he'd had to leave his wife, daughter, and mother behind in Vienna shortly after Austria lurched toward fascism, in 1933. Although he had long edited and contributed to the prestigious Viennese weekly *The Austrian Economist*, which published such celebrated figures as Friedrich Hayek and Joseph Schumpeter, he had come to discount his career as a thing of "theoretical and practical barrenness," and blamed himself for failing to diagnose his era's crucial political conflict. As so often for refugees, money was tight. Despite letters of reference from eminent historians, Polanyi failed to land a professorship or a fellowship, though he did manage to earn thirty-seven pounds co-editing an anti-fascist anthology, which featured essays by W. H. Auden and Reinhold Niebuhr. In his own contribution to the book, he argued that fascism strips democratic politics away from human society so that "only economic life remains," a skeleton without flesh.

In 1937, he taught in adult-education programs in Kent and Sussex, commuting by bus or train and spending the night at a student's house if it got too late to return home. The subject was British economic history, which he hadn't much studied before. As he learned how capitalism had challenged the political system of Great Britain, the first nation in the world to industrialize, he decided that it was no accident that fascism was infecting countries as disparate as Japan, Croatia, and Portugal. Fascism shouldn't be "ascribed to local causes, national mentalities, or historical backgrounds," he came to believe. It shouldn't even be thought of as a political movement. It was, rather, an "ever-given political possibility"—a reflex that could occur in any polity experiencing a certain kind of pain. In Polanyi's opinion, whenever the profit-making impulse becomes deadlocked with the need to shield people from its harmful side effects, voters are tempted by the "fascist solution": reconcile profit and security by forfeiting civic freedom. The insight became the keystone of his masterpiece, "The Great Transformation," which was published in 1944, as the world was coming to terms with the destruction that fascism had wrought.

Today, as in the nineteen-thirties, strongmen are ascendant worldwide, purging civil servants, subverting the judiciary, and bullying the press. In a sweeping, angry new book, "Can Democracy Survive Global Capitalism?" (Norton), the journalist, editor, and Brandeis professor Robert Kuttner champions Polanyi as a neglected prophet. Like Polanyi, he believes that free markets can be crueller than citizens will tolerate, inflicting a distress that he thinks is making us newly vulnerable to the fascist solution. In Kuttner's description, however, today's political impasse is different from that of the nineteen-thirties. It is being caused not by a stalemate between leftist governments and a reactionary business sector but by leftists *in* government who have reneged on their principles. Since the demise of the Soviet Union, Kuttner contends, America's Democrats, Britain's Labour Party, and many of Europe's social democrats have consistently tacked rightward, relinquishing concern for

ordinary workers and embracing the power of markets; they have sided with corporations and investors so many times that, by now, workers no longer feel represented by them. When strongmen arrived promising jobs and a shared sense of purpose, working-class voters were ready for the message.

Born in 1886 in Vienna, Karl Polanyi grew up in Budapest, in an assimilated, highly cultured Jewish family. Polanyi's father, an engineer who became a railroad contractor, was so conscientious that when his business failed, around 1900, he repaid the shareholders, plunging the family into genteel poverty. Polanyi's mother founded a women's college, hosted a salon, and had a somewhat chaotic personality that a daughter-in-law once likened to "a book not yet written." At home, as Gareth Dale recounts in a thoughtful 2016 biography, the family spoke German, French, and a little Hungarian; Karl also learned English, Latin, and Greek as a child. "I was taught tolerance not only by Goethe," he later recalled, "but also, with seemingly mutually exclusive accents, by Dostoyevsky and John Stuart Mill."

After university, Polanyi helped to found Hungary's Radical Citizens' Party, which called for land redistribution, free trade, and extended suffrage. But he remained enough of a traditionalist to enlist as a cavalry officer shortly after the First World War broke out. At the front, where, he said, "the Russian winter and the blackish steppe made me feel sick at heart," he read "Hamlet" obsessively, and wrote letters home asking his family to send volumes of Marx, Flaubert, and Locke. After the war, the Radical Citizens took power, but they fumbled it. In the short-lived Communist government that followed, Polanyi was offered a position in the culture ministry by his friend György Lukács, later a celebrated Marxist literary critic.

When the Communists fell, pogroms broke out, and Polanyi fled to Vienna. "He looked like one who looks back on life, not forward to it," Ilona Duczynska, who became his wife, remembered. Duczynska was a Communist engineer, ten years younger than he was. She had smuggled tsarist diamonds out of Russia in a tube of toothpaste and once borrowed a pistol to assassinate Hungary's Prime Minister, though he resigned before she could shoot him. She and Polanyi married in 1923 and soon had a daughter.

These were the days of so-called Red Vienna, when the city's socialist government was providing apartments for the working class and opening new libraries and kindergartens. Polanyi held informal seminars on socialist economics at home. He started writing for *The Austrian Economist* in 1924, and he was promoted to editor-in-chief a few months before the right-wing takeover sent him into exile. Duczynska remained in Vienna, going underground with a militia, but, in 1936, she, too, emigrated, taking a job as a cook in a London boarding house. In 1940, Bennington College offered Polanyi a lectureship, and he left for Vermont, where his family soon joined him and he began to turn his lecture notes into a book. "Not since 1920 did I have a time so rich in study and development," he wrote.

Polanyi starts "The Great Transformation" by giving capitalism its due. For all but eighteen months of the century prior to the First World War, he writes, a web of international trade and investment kept peace among Europe's great powers. Money crossed borders easily, thanks to the gold standard, a promise by each nation's central bank to sell gold at a fixed price in its own currency. This both harmonized trade between countries and stabilized relative currency values. If a nation started to sell more goods than it bought, gold streamed in, expanding the money supply, heating up the economy, and raising prices high enough to discourage foreign buyers—at which point, in a correction so smooth it almost seemed natural, exports sank back down to pre-boom levels. The trouble was that the system could be gratuitously cruel. If a country went into a recession or its currency weakened, the only remedy was to attract foreign money by forcing prices down, cutting government spending, or raising interest rates—which, in effect, meant throwing people out of work. "No private suffering, no restriction of sovereignty, was deemed too great a sacrifice for the recovery of monetary integrity," Polanyi wrote.

The system was sustainable politically only as long as those whose lives it ruined didn't have a say. But, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the right to vote spread. In the twenties and thirties, governments began trying to protect citizens' jobs from shifts in international prices by raising tariffs, so that, in the system's final years, it hardened national borders instead of opening them, and engendered what Polanyi called a "new crustacean type of nation," which turned away from international trade, making first one world war, and then another, inevitable.

In Vienna, Polanyi had heard socialism dismissed as utopian, on the ground that no central authority could efficiently manage millions of different wishes, resources, and capabilities. In "The Great Transformation," he swivelled this popgun around. What was utopian, he declared, was "the concept of a self-regulating market." Human life wasn't as orderly as mathematics, and only a goggle-eyed idealist would think it wise to lash people to a mechanism like the gold standard and then turn the crank. For most of human history, he observed, money and the exchange of goods had been embedded within culture, religion, and politics. The experiment of subordinating a nation to a self-adjusting market hadn't even been attempted until Britain tried it, in the mid-eighteen-thirties, and that effort had required a great deal of coördination and behind-the-scenes management. "Laissez-faire," Polanyi earnestly joked, "was planned."

On the other hand, Polanyi believed that resistance to market forces, which he dubbed "the countermovement," truly was spontaneous and ad hoc. He pointed to the motley of late-nineteenth-century measures—inspecting food and drink, subsidizing irrigation, regulating coal-mine ventilation, requiring vaccinations, protecting juvenile chimney sweeps, and so on—that were instituted to housebreak capitalism. Because such restraints went against the laws of supply and demand, they were despised by defenders of laissez-faire, who, Polanyi noticed, usually argued "that the incomplete application of its principles was the reason for every and any difficulty laid to its charge." But what was the alternative? Once the laissez-faire machine started running, it cheerfully annihilated the people and the natural environment that it made use of, unless it was restrained.

Polanyi offered the example of the enclosure movement in sixteenth-century

England, when landowners tore down villages and turned common lands into private pastures. The changes brought efficiencies that raised the land's food yield as well as its value, in the long term improving life for everyone. Enclosure was a good thing, in other words; the numbers said so. In the short term, however, it dispossessed peasants who couldn't immediately improvise a new living, and it was only because of a countermovement—led in piecemeal fashion by the monarchy, in a long, losing battle with Parliament—that more people didn't die of exposure and starvation. If you argued that resistance did not compute, you would be right, but the countermovement, though it couldn't stop progress, shielded people by slowing it down. It made enclosure so gradual that, even three centuries later, the poet John Clare was lamenting its advance in his sonnets.

In the nineteen-thirties, when Polanyi was first formulating his critique, the British economist John Maynard Keynes was likewise arguing that capitalist economies aren't self-adjusting. The markets for labor, goods, and money, he showed, don't find equilibriums independently but through interactions with one another that can have unfortunate, counterintuitive side effects. In hard times, economies tend to retrench, just when stimulus is most needed; the richer they get, the less likely they are to invest enough to sustain their wealth. During the Depression, Keynes made the case that governments should deficit-spend their way out of recessions. By the time Polanyi's book was published, the Keynesian view had become orthodoxy. For the next few decades, the world's leading economies were tightly managed by their governments. America's top marginal tax rate stayed at ninety-one per cent until 1964, and anti-usury laws kept a ceiling on interest rates until the late seventies. The memory of the financial chaos of the thirties, and of the fascism that it gave rise to, was still vivid, and the Soviet Union loomed as an alternative, should the Western democracies fail to treat their workers well.

In terms of international monetary systems, too, Keynesianism held sway. In 1944, at the Bretton Woods Conference, Keynes helped to negotiate a way of harmonizing exchange rates that gave national governments enough elbow room to boost their domestic economies when necessary. Only America continued to redeem its currency with gold. Other nations pegged their currencies to the dollar (making it their reserve currency), but they were free to adjust their currencies' values within limits when the need arose. Countries were allowed, and sometimes even required, to impose capital controls, measures that limited the cross-border flow of investment capital. With investors unable to yank money suddenly from one country to another, governments were free to spur growth with low interest rates and to spend on social programs without fear that inflation-averse capitalists would sell off their nations' bonds. So weak was the political power of investors that France, Britain, and America let inflation shrink the value of their war debts considerably. In France, the economist Thomas Piketty has quipped, the period amounted to "capitalism without capitalists."

The result—highly inconvenient for free-market fundamentalists—was prosperity. In the three decades following the Second World War, per-capita output grew faster in Western Europe and North America than ever before or since. There were no significant banking or financial crises. The real income of Europeans rose as much as it had in the previous hundred and fifty years, and American unemployment, which had ranged between fourteen and twenty-five per cent in the thirties, dropped to an average of 4.6 per cent in the fifties. The new wealth was widely shared, too; income inequality plummeted across the developed world. And with the plenty came calm. The economic historian Barry Eichengreen, in his new book, "The Populist Temptation" (Oxford), reports that in twenty advanced nations no populist leader—which he defines as a politician who is "anti-elite, authoritarian, and nativist"—took office during this golden era, and that a far narrower share of votes went to extremist parties than before or after.

"This was the road once taken," Kuttner writes. "There was no economic need for a different one." Nevertheless, we strayed—or, rather, in Kuttner's telling, we were driven off the road after capitalists grabbed the steering wheel away from the Keynesians. The year 1973, in his opinion, marked "the end of the postwar social contract." Politicians began snipping away restraints on investors and financiers, and the economy returned to spasming and sputtering. Between 1973 and 1992, per-capita income growth in the developed world fell to half of what it had been between 1950 and 1973. Income inequality rebounded. By 2010, the real median earnings of prime-age American workingmen were four per cent lower than they had been in 1970. American women's earnings rose for a bit longer, as more women made their way into the workforce, but declined after 2000. And, as Polanyi would have predicted, faith in democracy slipped. Kuttner warns that support for right-wing extremists in Western Europe is even higher today than it was in the nineteen-thirties.

But was Keynesianism pushed, or did it stumble? Kuttner's indignation about its fall from grace is more straightforward than the course of events that led to it. In the years following the Second World War, Europe was swimming with dollars, thanks to the Marshall Plan and American military aid to Europe. Beyond America's jurisdiction, those dollars slipped free of its capital controls, and in the nineteen-sixties investors began to sling them from country to country as impetuously as in the days before Bretton Woods, punitively dumping the bonds of any government that tried to run an interest rate lower than those of its peers. The cost of the Vietnam War sparked inflation in America, and the dollar's second life as the world's reserve currency risked pushing the inflation even higher. When America fell into recession in 1970, the Federal Reserve tried to boost the country out of it by dropping interest rates, and America became a target of opportunity for speculators: capital fled the country, taking gold with it. By May, 1971, the United States was facing its first merchandise trade deficit since 1893, an indication that the high dollar was discouraging foreign buyers. Unwilling to pacify investors by inflicting austerity on voters, President Richard Nixon uncoupled the dollar from gold, ending the Bretton Woods agreement. Then, in October, 1973, Arab nations, upset about Ameri-

ca's solidarity with Israel during the Yom Kippur War, embargoed oil sales to the United States, and the price of crude nearly quadrupled in the space of three months. Food prices skyrocketed, and, as wallets were pinched, the country tumbled into another recession.

At this juncture, a new economic monster appeared: stagflation, a chimera of inflation, recession, and unemployment. Keynesian economists, who didn't think that high unemployment and inflation could coëxist, were at a loss for how to handle it. The predicament provided an opening for their critics, most notably Milton Friedman, who argued that incessant government stimulation of the economy risked promoting not only inflation but the expectation of inflation, which could then spiral out of control. Friedman declared Keynesianism discredited and demanded that the government refrain from tampering with the economy, other than to manage the money supply.

In 1974, Alan Greenspan, President Gerald Ford's economic adviser and an acolyte of Ayn Rand, likewise urged resisting political pressure to help the economy grow. "Inflation is our domestic public enemy No. 1," Ford declared, and the Federal Reserve raised interest rates. Five years later, when a revolution in Iran set off a second spike in oil prices, a new round of inflation, and yet another recession, President Jimmy Carter's Federal Reserve chair, Paul Volcker, raised interest rates again and again, to as high as twenty per cent. By 1982, America's G.D.P. was shrinking 2.2 per cent a year, and unemployment was higher than it had been since the Great Depression. The nation had gone back to stabilizing its currency the old-fashioned way—by throwing people out of work—and utopian faith in self-regulating free markets had made a comeback. Kuttner thinks that this was a terrible mistake, arguing that the inflation of the seventies was limited to particular sectors of the economy such as food and oil. That sounds a little like special pleading. It's not clear how Ford and Carter could have resisted the pressure they were under to find a new policy solution once it was clear that the old one wasn't working.

In time, Keynesians adapted their models—one adjustment took into account Friedman's discovery of the dangers posed by the expectation of inflation—and the resulting synthesis, New Keynesianism, is now canonical. Both the Bush and the Obama Administrations adopted Keynesian policies in response to the financial crisis of 2008. But when stagflation flummoxed the Keynesians it cost them their near-monopoly on political advice-giving, and laissez-faire was rereleased into the political sphere. In January, 1974, the United States removed constraints on sending capital abroad. A 1978 Supreme Court decision overturned most state laws against usury. By the early twenty-first century, Kuttner charges, every New Deal regulation on finance was either "repealed or weakened by non-enforcement." Starting in the eighties, developing nations found free-market doctrine written into their loan agreements: bankers refused to extend credit unless the nations promised to lift capital controls, balance their budgets, limit taxes and social spending, and aim to sell more goods abroad—an uncanny replica of the austerity terms enforced under the gold standard. The set of policies became known as the Washington Consensus. The idea was pain in the short term for the sake of progress in the long term, but a 2011 meta-analysis was unable to find statistically significant evidence that the trade-off is worth it. Even if it is worth it, Polanyi would have recommended tempering the short-term pain. From 2010, when austerity measures were first imposed on Greece, to 2016, its G.D.P. declined 35.6 per cent, according to the World Bank. A federally appointed panel is now pushing for a similar approach in Puerto Rico.

There is no shortage of villains in Kuttner's narrative: financial deregulation; supply-side tax cuts; the decline of trade unions; the Democratic Party, which, by zigging left on identity politics and zagging right on economics, left conservative white working-class voters amenable to Donald Trump. Perhaps the most vexed issue Kuttner discusses, however, is trade policy—whether American workers should be protected against cheap foreign goods and labor.

The contours of the problem call to mind Polanyi's account of enclosures in early-modern England. Half an hour with a supply-and-demand graph shows that free trade is better for every nation, developed or developing, no matter how much an individual businessperson might wish for a special tariff to protect her line of work. In a 2012 survey, eighty-five per cent of economists agreed that, in the long run, the boons of free trade "are much larger than any effects on employment." But although free trade benefits a country over all, it almost always benefits some citizens more than—and even at the expense of—others. The proportion of low-skilled labor in America is smaller than in most countries that trade with America; economic theory therefore predicts that international trade will, on aggregate, make low-skilled workers in the United States worse off. The U.S. government has, since 1962, compensated



THE REAL HOUSEWIVES OF ALPHA CENTAURI



"Let me just charge it for ten more seconds."

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workers laid off because of free trade, but the benefit has never been adequate; only *four* people were certified to receive it during its first decade. In a 2016 paper, "The China Shock," the economists David H. Autor, David Dorn, and Gordon H. Hanson wrote that, for every additional hundred dollars of Chinese goods imported to an area, a manufacturing worker is likely to lose fifty-five dollars of income, while gaining only six dollars in government help.

In a laissez-faire utopia, dislodged workers would relocate or take jobs in other industries, but workers hurt by rivalry with China are doing neither. Maybe they don't have the resources to move; maybe the flood of Chinese-made goods is so extensive that there are no unaffected manufacturing sectors for them to switch into. The authors of "The China Shock" calculate that, between 1999 and 2011, trade with China destroyed between two million and 2.4 million American jobs; Kuttner quotes even higher estimates. NAFTA, meanwhile, lowered the wage growth of American high-school dropouts in affected industries by sixteen percentage points. In "Why Liberalism Failed" (Yale), the political scientist Patrick J. Deneen denounces the assumption that "increased purchasing power of cheap goods will compensate for the absence of economic security."

Kuttner follows Polanyi in attacking free-market claims of mathematic purity. "Literally no nation has industrialized by relying on free markets," he writes. In 1791, Alexander Hamilton recommended that America encourage new branches of manufacturing by taxing imports and subsidizing domestic production. Even Britain, the world's first great champion of free trade, started off protectionist. Kuttner believes that America stopped supporting its manufacturing sector partly because it got into the habit, during the Cold War, of rewarding foreign allies with access to American consumers, and eventually decided that exports of financial services, rather than of manufactured goods, would be the country's future. Toward the end of the century, as American manufacturers saw the writing on the wall, they shifted production abroad.

Kuttner doesn't give a full hearing to the usual reply by defenders of laissez-faire, which is that a transition from goods to services is inevitable in a maturing economy—that the efficiency of American manufacturing means that it would likely be shedding workers no matter what the government did. Even Eichengreen, a critic of globalization, notes, in "The Populist Temptation," that, if you graph the share of the German workforce employed in manufacturing from 1970 to 2012, you see a steady, grim decline very similar to that of its American counterpart, despite the fact that Germany has long spent heavily on apprenticeship and vocational training. The industrial revolution created widely shared wealth almost magically at its dawn: when an unemployed farmworker took a job in a factory, his power to make things multiplied, along with his earning power, without his having to learn much. But, as factories grew more efficient, fewer workers were needed to run them. One study has attributed eighty-seven per cent of lost manufacturing jobs to improved productivity.

When a worker leaves a factory, her power to create wealth stops being multiplied. The only way to increase it again is through education—by teaching her to become a sommelier, say, or an anesthesiologist. But efficiency gains are notoriously harder to come by in service industries than in manufacturing ones. There are only so many leashes a dog walker can hold at one time. As a result, if an economy deindustrializes without securing a stable manufacturing core, its productivity may erode. The dynamic has caused stagnation in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, and there are signs of a comparable weakening of America's earning power.

Meanwhile, in the factories that remain, machines have grown more complex; the few workers they employ need to be better educated, further widening the gap between educated and uneducated workers. Kuttner dismisses this labor-skills explanation for job loss as an "alibi" with "an insulting subtext": "If your economic life has gone to hell, it's your fault." This is intemperate but, in Kuttner's defense, he has been warning American politicians to protect manufacturing jobs since 1991, and has been enlisting Polanyi in the cause for at least as long. Moreover, he has a point: to talk about productivity-induced job loss when challenged to explain trade-induced job loss is to change the subject. Economists estimate that advances in automation explain only thirty to forty per cent of the premium that a college

degree now adds to wages. And though Eichengreen is right about manufacturing's declining share of the German workforce, it still stood at twenty per cent in 2012, which is roughly where the American share stood three decades earlier, and the German decline has been less steep. Somehow, Germany's concern for its manufacturing workforce made a difference.

In any case, if one's concern is populism, it may not matter whether jobs have been lost to trade competition or to automation. In areas where more industrial robots have been introduced, one analysis shows, voters were more likely to choose Trump in 2016. According to another analysis, if competition with Chinese imports had been somehow halved, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania would likely have chosen Hillary Clinton that year. Economic explanations like these have been challenged. In April, the political scientist Diana C. Mutz published a paper finding that Trump voters were no more likely than Clinton ones to have suffered a personal financial setback; she concluded that Trump's victory was more likely caused by white anxiety about loss of status and social dominance. But it's not surprising that Trump voters weren't basing their decisions on their personal circumstances, because voters almost never do. And Mutz's own results showed that the factors most likely to lead to a Trump vote included pessimism about the economy and preferring Trump's position on China to Clinton's. It may not be possible to untangle economic anxiety and a more tribal mind-set.

Casting about for a Polanyi-style countermovement to temper the ruthlessness of laissez-faire, Kuttner doesn't rule out tariffs. They're economically inefficient, but so are unions, and, for a follower of Polanyi, efficiency isn't the only consideration. A decision about a nation's economic life, the Harvard economist Dani Rodrik writes, in "Straight Talk on Trade" (Princeton), "may entail trading off competing social objectives—such as stability versus innovation—or making distributional choices"; that is, deciding who gains at whose expense. Such a decision should therefore be made by elected politicians rather than by economists. America imposed export quotas on Japan in the seventies and eighties, to the alarm of headline writers at the time: "PROTECTIONIST THREAT," the *Times* warned. But Rodrik, looking back, judges the measures to have been reasonable ad-hoc defenses—"necessary responses to the distributional and adjustment challenges posed by the emergence of new trade relationships."

Trump's chief trade negotiator served on the Reagan team that administered quotas against Japan. A similar approach today, however, seems unlikely to work on China, whose economy is much more messily enmeshed with America's. You probably can't name as many Chinese brands as Japanese ones, even though you probably buy more Chinese-made products, because they are sold to Americans by American companies. American workers may wish they had been shielded from the effects of trade with China, but American businesses, by and large, don't. Perhaps that's why Trump has escalated from a tariff on steel and aluminum to erratic threats of a trade war. To achieve his campaign goal of bringing manufacturing jobs home from China, he will have to not only impose tariffs but also convince multinationals that the tariffs will stay in place beyond the end of his Administration. Only then will executives calculate that they can't just wait it out—that they have no choice but to incur the enormous costs and capital losses of abandoning investments in China and making new ones here. It's hard to imagine such a scheme working, unless Trump establishes a political command over the private sector not seen in America since the forties. That can't be ruled out, given the state of affairs in Russia, China, Hungary, and Turkey, but it seems more likely that Trump's bluster will merely motivate businesses to be deferential to him, in pursuit of favorable treatment.

"Basically there are two solutions," Polanyi wrote in 1935. "The extension of the democratic principle from politics to economics, or the abolition of the democratic 'political sphere' altogether." In other words, socialism or fascism. The choice may not be so stark, however. During America's golden age of full employment, the economy came, in structural terms, as close as it ever has to socialism, but it remained capitalist at its core, despite the government's restraining hand. The result was that workers shared directly in the country's growing wealth, whereas today proposals for fostering greater financial equality hinge on taxing winners in order to fund programs that compensate losers. Such redistributive measures, Kuttner observes, are only "second bests." They don't do much for social cohesion: winners resent the loss of earnings; losers, the loss of dignity.

Can we return to an equality in workers' primary incomes rather than to one brought about by secondary redistribution? In a recent essay for the journal *Democracy*, the Roosevelt Institute fellow Jennifer Harris recommends reimagining international trade as an engine for this rather than as an obstacle to it. When negotiating trade deals, for instance, governments could make going to bat for multinationals conditional on their agreeing to, say, pay their workers a higher fraction of what they pay executives.

Failing that, we'd be better off with redistributive programs that are universal—parental leave, national health care—rather than targeted. Benefits available to everyone help people without making them feel like charity cases. Kuttner reports great things from Scandinavia, where governments support workers directly—through wage subsidies, retraining sabbaticals, and temporary public jobs—rather than by constraining employers' power to fire people. "We won't protect jobs," Sweden's labor minister recently told the *Times*. "But we will protect workers." Income inequality in Scandinavia is lower than here, and a larger proportion of citizens work. Maybe a government can insure higher pay for its workers by treating them as if they were, in and of themselves, valuable. True, Denmark's spending on its labor policies has at times risen to as high as 4.5 per cent of its G.D.P., more than the share America spends on defense, and studies show that diverse countries such as ours find it harder to muster social altruism than more racially and culturally homogenous ones do. Nonetheless, programs like Social Security and Medicare, instituted when a communitarian ethic was still strong in American politics, remain popular. Why not try for more? It might make sense even if the numbers don't add up. ♦

THE ART WORLD

NAKED

Chaim Soutine's vulnerable ferocity.

By Peter Schjeldahl

"Flesh," the title of a small, potent, and timely Chaim Soutine retrospective, elegantly curated by Stephen Brown, at the Jewish Museum, is genteel. "Meat" would better fit the show's focus on the ferocious paintings of plucked fowl and bloody animal carcasses that the great and, I believe, underrated Russian-French artist made in the mid-nineteen-twenties, in Paris. Other uses of "meat," for an argument's main point or for any solid content, apply as well. The centerpiece of the show, "Carcass of Beef" (circa 1925), on loan from the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, in Buffalo, activates all those meanings. Painted in reds and blues as luminous as those of Gothic stained glass, it communes with Rembrandt's seventeenth-century masterpiece "The Slaughtered Ox," which Soutine contemplated often and intensely in the Louvre, and it crackles with formal improvisations (one swift white line rescues a large blue zone from incoherence) and wild emotion. It's an event—an emergence, an emergency—that transpires ceaselessly while you look. Soutine has long been a marginal figure in modern-art history. Clement Greenberg, in 1951, adjudged his work "exotic" and "futile," owing to its lack of "reassuring unity" and "decorative ordering." But today Soutine feels of the moment, amid quite enough reassurance and decorativeness in recent art.



"Carcass of Beef" crackles with improvisation and emotion.

COURTESY ARS, NY

Soutine, born in a shtetl in the Lithuanian part of Russia (now Belarus) in 1893, the tenth of eleven children in a family of menders (a caste below tailors), was an outlier all his life. An early passion for painting appalled his father and at least two of his brothers, who gave him a beating for his secular heresy. In 1909, a small sum from his mother financed his departure to art school, which he attended briefly in Minsk and then for three years in Vilnius. There, he subsisted on modest patronage from a local doctor. At the age of twenty, in 1913, he emigrated with a fellow-artist to Paris and settled in a decrepit building—a warren of scruffy studios—in Montparnasse. A year later, he met Amedeo Modigliani, who became a close friend and whose death, in 1920, from tubercular meningitis, which had been worsened by drinking, left Soutine with a horror of alcohol. But he was otherwise a model bohemian, uncouth and turbulent while, at least in photographs, appealingly waifish. He haunted the Louvre and painted still-lifes in a mélange of styles informed by both Cézanne and, though for some reason he always angrily denied it, van Gogh. An arrangement of two forks resting on a dish of three herring, from 1916, evokes a meagre shared meal. Soutine was known in his circle for going without food so that he could buy art materials and, later, for fasting before he painted meat, using hunger to sharpen his perception. Among his other crotchets was an aversion to bare canvas. He preferred to work over old paintings that he acquired cheaply from antique dealers and flea markets.

In 1918, with Paris under threat of German invasion, Soutine moved to Ceret, near the border of Spain, and spent much of the next three years travelling in the South of France. He painted landscapes that are as vertiginous, to the brink of formlessness, as anything in art to this day: tornadoes of pigment, which are beloved by every painter I've ever talked with about them. His woozily contoured portraits of random people—friends, a hotel page, a bride, a pastry cook—force an oxymoron: empathetic caricature, seeming at once to mock and to cherish hapless humanity. Soutine's genius peaks in the meat pictures, made after his return to Paris, in 1921. He bought the subjects from slaughterhouses and held on to them for so long that, according to an oft-told tale, their rotting stench drove his neighbors to call the police. He pleaded artistic necessity and—all hail the French—managed a compromise by agreeing to abate the smell with formaldehyde. Unfortunately, the

chemical dulled the meat's colors, which Soutine remedied by regularly dousing the carcasses with fresh blood. He worked spasmodically, with ecstatic frenzies following fallow spells. Rather than take the time to clean brushes, he discarded them from one color to the next. The used brushes would litter the floor of his studio.

In 1922, the premier American collector of modern painting, Albert Barnes, visited Soutine's dealer. Close to fifty paintings were on offer. Barnes bought them all. (Sixteen of them are on view at the recently relocated museum of the Barnes Foundation, in downtown Philadelphia.) Success in Paris came apace. Just twenty-nine years old, Soutine was a star, profiting from a renewed taste for representational art in the demoralized wake of the First World War. He came to be associated with German and Austrian Expressionism—a mistake. Expressionism is a style. Soutine tore style to shreds. There's a strangely realist immediacy to the meat paintings. He strove by any means expedient—palette knife, sticks, his thumbs—to transpose the forms and the substances that he saw directly into the stuff of paint. The process could seem like something between a mud-wrestling match and a fight to the death: horrific, in the instances of chickens plucked naked and strung up by the neck, their beaks agape as if screaming. Other pictures are tender: whole dead rabbits and fish as peaceable as children who have been sung to sleep. Greenberg complained that Soutine's work was "more like life itself than like visual art." Right he was! Soutine's best paintings convey nothing so much as a desperate exasperation with "visual art."

Even Soutine's failures fascinate, as evidence of the artistic risks that he ran. For "Still Life with Rayfish" (circa 1924), he started with the pictured objects to do a version of "The Ray" (1725-26), by Chardin. You feel him yearning to engage with the ruddy flesh of the sea creature but distracted by having to incorporate images of a cat, a pot, and other impedimenta from the Chardin. Complex composition stymied him. But the ambition of the work is piercingly moving, as testimony to what painting can do by way of demonstrating what it can't. Soutine's production declined in the nineteen-thirties, when, his original furies spent, he gravitated toward some of the typically French modes of pictorial balance and painterly cuisine that formerly he had blown sky high.

Then came the war. The show ends with heartbreaking, scrappy little paintings that were all that Soutine could muster while moving from place to place west of Paris, hiding after the Germans occupied the city, in June of 1940. Stomach troubles, undoubtedly exacerbated by fear, became dire. In the summer of 1943, friends smuggled him by a circuitous route to a hospital in Paris, where he underwent emergency surgery for perforated ulcers. He died soon afterward, at the age of fifty, and was buried in Montparnasse Cemetery.

Soutine's reputation soared after the war. He was cited as a major forebear of Abstract Expressionism. Willem de Kooning called Soutine his favorite painter and once made a remark that applies not only to the likes of Titian, whom he probably had in mind, but also very neatly to Soutine's meat pictures: "Flesh is the reason oil paint was invented." Greenberg, while maintaining his authoritative dismissal of Soutine, had to begrudge that "one has to go back to Rembrandt . . . to find anything to which his touch . . . can be likened." (That's spot on. Like Rembrandt's, Soutine's brushstrokes can feel sensate, as if talking back to the painter with ideas of their own.) And if any artist justifies Harold Rosenberg's heady definition of what he called "Action painting"—a notion of the canvas as an existential "arena in which to act" rather than the ground of an aesthetic pursuit—it would be Soutine, though without the macho pathos that Rosenberg celebrated in de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, and Franz Kline. Meanwhile, being favored by fashion incurred a cost when Pop and Minimalism conquered the art world, in the early sixties. Ever since, Soutine has occupied a blind spot in contemporary tastes. That should end now. Let slide the weary art-historical narratives that lock Soutine into categories of style and sequences of influence. Only look. ♦

POP MUSIC

WHITE-RAPPER BLUES

Post Malone's pursuit of happiness.

By Hua Hsu



As the story goes, Post Malone uploaded the song "White Iverson" to his SoundCloud page on the night of February 4, 2015. When he went to sleep, he was anonymous and broke. Within a day, the song had changed his life. Like many viral hits, "White Iverson" succeeded in part because it was divisive, inspiring awe and annoyance, bewilderment and mild scorn. The cavernous, slightly melancholy beat conjured both R. & B. and New Age meditation music. Post, who was born Austin Post, sang with a conviction that seemed strange and unearned, even a bit ridiculous: he was a white teen-ager invoking the legendarily tough basketball player Allen Iverson to describe his own triumphs over adversity. It was the sound of a profoundly unlikely victory lap, "swaggin'" and "ballin'" against all odds.

Post's road to stardom has been thoroughly modern. He was born in Syracuse and grew up in the suburbs of Dallas, and became interested in the guitar after playing the video game Guitar Hero II. In his teens, he performed in a series of rock bands, rapped, and made videos that he posted on YouTube and Vine. After high school, he moved to Los Angeles, where he lived in a house full of aspiring gamers and YouTubers. As they streamed their Minecraft sessions, he would play the guitar and sing songs by Queen and Frank Sinatra. The name Post Malone came from an online rap-name generator.

Genre meant less to Post than fame did. He eventually began working with the producers FKi 1st and Rex Kudo on songs that merged hip-hop's low end with rock- and folk-influenced melodies. "White Iverson," which came to him as he was having his hair braided in the style of the basketball player, was one of these. While Post didn't exactly come from nowhere—when he uploaded what would become his viral hit, he was already working with a savvy management team—his career trajectory was unusually accelerated. Within months, he went from playing on packed bills in not-so-packed clubs to touring with Justin Bieber and collaborating with Kanye West.

His début album, "Stoney," from 2016, went double platinum; it was filled with catchy, charmingly uncouth songs, like the swirly and majestic rags-to-riches anthem "Congratulations." The songs were goofy, fun, and perfectly paced for drunken, arena-wide sing-alongs. Post flitted between the rat-a-tat rhythms of rapping and gristly, power-ballad crooning. He seemed incapable of angst, and came across as a gleeful and self-effacing hero who appreciated designer labels and room-temperature Bud Light. He became a kind of patron saint of living your best life.

Last year, Post released "rockstar," featuring the impassive Atlanta rapper 21 Savage, as the lead single for his second album, "beerbongs & bentleys." There were rumors that Post's label, Republic Records, had figured out a way to hack the *Billboard* charts by releasing a video on YouTube that included a loop of the song's chorus, and also links to streaming services where fans could hear the rest. The loop video was only a free "preview" for the song, yet both YouTube views and full streams were counted in the single's *Billboard* stats.

This manipulation seemed plausible, given Post's intuitive feel for how the Internet works. Regardless, "rockstar," a

Post once described hip-hop as a good way to "stay in a positive mood."

ILLUSTRATION BY NICK LITTLE

menacing I.V. drip of a song, captured something essential about his appeal as a white artist who knows his way around the guitar. Rock once represented a rival genre to hip-hop, or at least a mainstream to reckon with. But rock's rebellion now feels remote. When rappers today embrace punk-era leather jackets and heavy-metal-style typefaces, they do so to channel a past that seems purely hedonistic, a constant pursuit of release. It's less about finding joy in struggle—hip-hop's underlying impulse—than about seeing how far you can throw a TV out a hotel window. As Post's chorus attests, "Ayy, I've been fuckin' hos and poppin' pillies/Man, I feel just like a rockstar."

"Beerbongs & bentleys" was released late last month, and set a record on Spotify for first-day streams. It is, as the title suggests, a celebration of Post's multitudes. "Made a hundred bands, so all your hands out/No, my friend, can't do no handouts," he raps, on "Zack and Codeine," one of many songs about partying through the night. He is a full-fledged rock star now, and his life is defined by that status, whether he's buying out the bar every night in every city or just expressing nostalgia for the life he has left behind. For every small mountain of cocaine, there's a realization that some things will never be the same. "One hundred models I could follow all the way to hell and back/But they can't replace you," he sings to a bygone lover and confidante, on "Otherside." I already feel sympathy for all the people whose breakups will be chased first by the defiant bounce of "Better Now" and later, once reality sets in, by the acoustic ballad "Stay."

Much of this feels like the kind of thing you're obliged to say on your second album, now that fame threatens to imprison you. "Can't trust a soul/Like I'm Snowden," he wails, on "Paranoid." Post still sings with a soulful, warbling commitment, but increasingly he relies on power chords and heavy-metal drumming (Tommy Lee, of Mötley Crüe, performs on "Over Now") to convey his wish to leave it all behind. "I used to say I was free/Now all these people wanna keep on takin' pieces of me," Post sings, on the sludgy, atmospheric "Blame It on Me." "It's not my fault, it's not my fault," he protests, his voice rising in an anguished, Auto-Tuned mangle.

In 2017, Post told an interviewer in Poland that he rarely turned to hip-hop for emotional nourishment. "If you're looking for lyrics, if you're looking to cry, if you're looking to think about life, don't listen to hip-hop," he said. For that, he preferred Bob Dylan. He described hip-hop as "fun," a way to "have a good time and stay in a positive mood."

Being a white rapper is no longer all that unusual or fraught a career path, but, in an interview with *GQ* earlier this year, Post alluded to his unique "struggle." He has tried, on occasion, to distance himself from hip-hop, even speculating that he might someday embrace country music. But Post is indeed different from other white rappers, most of whom try to prove their bona fides through virtuosity or political solidarity. On one track from "beerbongs," G-Eazy (who is white) and YG (who is black) trade verses about encountering the "same bitches" everywhere they go. It's on a song like this that Post's low-key innovations become apparent. G-Eazy sounds workmanlike, punchy, direct. Post's verse, by contrast, is full of melodies, half rapped and half sung, that seem to weave around the beat, digressing into the Zombies' "Time of the Season."

Post later apologized for his comments in Poland, which seemed to demonstrate a deep misunderstanding of hip-hop's origins. Yet it's likely that he was saying something that many of his fans, particularly those who discovered him through Bieber, or who took seriously the trials of "White Iverson," accept unquestioningly: that hip-hop is an idiom, a stylistic flourish, a way to wear your hair, not a history or a tradition to which one pays homage, or at least lip service. "I'm just trying to keep living and make the music that I love," Post said in a video he posted on Twitter.

An executive at Post's record label once likened him to Donald Trump, because controversies that might have killed someone else's career had only made him stronger. A video showing him using the N-word as a teen, his days as a Minecraft streamer, debates about cultural appropriation, his protestations that white rappers face a unique struggle: these all seemed to confirm the sense, among his fan base, that he was just an earnest young man feeling his way through the world.

Some people are free to live their best lives. Others are just trying to live. Two weeks ago, Kanye West, who had Post sing on his 2016 single "Fade," returned to Twitter after a long break from social media. He posted sketches, random musings, renderings of some chunky blue sandals that he had designed; he professed his admiration for President Trump and for the teen-age gun-control activist Emma González; he cited the influence of the conservative pundit Candace Owens, and of the artists David Hammons and Joseph Beuys. He teased a string of projects that he was working on, and then released some baffling new music that tempered expectations for those projects.

What made West's increasingly enervated stream of tweets so fascinating was their commitment to a principle of absolute freedom. He repeatedly referred to himself as a "free thinker," someone who can't be silenced by convention. He envisages a world where we are beholden only to our individual whims, not the dictates of society.

Perhaps pop stars, whose lives are evaluated based on clout and fame, and who have often spent their careers defying expectations, desire a different, me-first kind of freedom than the rest of us do. The major labels are scrambling to capitalize on culture-defining icons like West, or on fleeting bursts of viral fame like "White Iverson," and their status as gatekeeping authorities has diminished. In recent years, this shift has resulted in a kind of anything-goes opportunity: the freedom to say whatever you want in the name of artistic vision; the freedom never to be misunderstood or misinterpreted; the freedom to do what you love simply because you love it.

The music of Post Malone is about this kind of freedom, a carefree pursuit of whatever makes you happy—until one day you look around and realize that you are "in a big house all alone," as he sings on one of the album's most desperate meditations on the fruits of his success. Over some euphoric woodwinds and pummelling drums, he fantasizes about the insufficiency of his fantasies. "I was livin' life, how could I have known?/Couldn't listen to advice 'cause I'm never wrong/In the spotlight but I'm on my own/Now they're all gone." The song is called "Rich & Sad." ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS

"Tully" and "Beast."

By Anthony Lane

Having made one anxious film about motherhood, the writer Diablo Cody and the director Jason Reitman have now delivered another. "Juno" (2007) was the tale of a teen-ager who becomes pregnant; deciding against abortion, she then wrestles with the prospect of giving the baby up for adoption. This time around, in "Tully," there are no alternatives. By the time the movie starts, Marlo (Charlize Theron) is already great with child—so great, indeed, that it's difficult to greet her with an embrace. "I have my own personal hug-buffer now," she says.

Marlo is married to Drew (Ron Livingston), who is both a nice guy and, qua guy, a paragon of uselessness. His nightly routine, according to Marlo, runs as follows: "Goes upstairs, puts on a headset, kills zombies, and passes out." They have two children, Sarah (Lia Frankland) and her younger brother, Jonah (Asher Miles Fallica), an unquiet soul who likes to kick the back of the driver's seat when Marlo is at the wheel (why doesn't she just shift him to the other side of the car?) and is described by his school principal as "out of the box" and—Marlo's least favorite word—"quirky." As she says, that makes him sound like a ukulele. So disruptive is his conduct in class that he may have to change schools. Everything, in other words, is nicely primed for the birth of Marlo's third child.



In Jason Reitman's film, a struggling mother and a night nurse grow close.

When the union of Nick and Nora Charles was blessed with a son, in "Another Thin Man," bringing up baby was quite straightforward: the couple laid their offspring in a crib with Mommy's pearl necklace to play with, and a fox terrier to watch over him, and waited for the kid to grow up fast so that he could try one of Daddy's Martinis. Simple stuff. But that fine movie was released in 1939, whereas "Tully" is—and could only be—the product of a time and a place in which parenting has become both a gerund and a secular faith, complete with devotees, dietary laws, doctrinal disputes, and a range of denominations. Reitman and Cody, needless to say, are founts of heresy, and proud of it. They reserve their sourest dissent for people like Elyse (Elaine Tan), Marlo's immaculate sister-in-law, who has truffled mac and cheese dished up for her kids and announces that her daughter is busy at a talent show. "What's her talent?" Marlo asks. "Pilates," Elyse replies.

But the movie travels beyond the sardonic, as Reitman's "Up in the Air" (2009) ventured to do, into the realms of world-weariness. When Marlo declines to hold her newborn baby, Mia, and when, later, she stands outside the car in which Mia is squalling and screams "Fuck!," we suspect not exhaustion, or postnatal depression, so much as a basic reluctance to lead the life—and to nurture the new lives—that society expects. At dinner one evening, Marlo spills food on her top, and yanks it off. "Mom, what's wrong with your body?" Sarah asks, aghast that her mother has slumped so far out of shape. The line is an ironic glance at Theron, who, as proven by her Oscar-winning turn, in "Monster" (2003), sometimes uses her screen appearances to scar the gilded purity of her modelling image; for "Tully," she reportedly gained more than fifty pounds. But the dinner scene also jabs at a culture so unforgiving that mothers are exhorted to reclaim their prenatal figure, or to return to work, with preternatural haste. Maternity, "Tully" suggests, is neither an unmixed blessing nor a blip.

Hold on, though. Help is at hand. Marlo's wealthy brother Craig (Mark Duplass)—"his factory setting is asshole," she fondly remarks—offers to pay for a night nurse. And so, like a genie emerging from a lamp, up pops Tully (Mackenzie Davis): youthful, limber, funny, and free. This godsend arrives at the close of a long day, promising to "take care" of Marlo. "I thought you were taking care of the baby," Marlo says. "Right now, you pretty much *are* the baby," Tully replies. Henceforth, harmony descends once more, like manna, upon the household; cakes are baked for school, flowers are arranged on the breakfast table, and Marlo catches up on sleep. Tully is like Mary Poppins without the bossiness, except that Mary seldom lounged in a hot tub with her employer, as Tully does with Marlo, sharing secrets and revelling in the manlessness of their bond. Even sex is back on the menu. As Marlo wakes her husband for some dozy

 ILLUSTRATION BY ANGELICA ALZONA

nocturnal action, Tully is on the bed, too, in creepy attendance; Drew barely notices her there, but, then, he failed to introduce himself on her first day—bizarre, given that she has such intimate access to his home. What's going on?

As in "Young Adult" (2011), a previous team effort from Reitman, Cody, and Theron, there are stirrings of genuine audacity here, and a willingness to claw through uncomfortable themes. The sad fact, however, is that, as "Tully" proceeds, it tumbles into clunkiness, and there's a desperate unsubtlety to the improvement in Marlo's lot, as dramatized by a pair of musical montages: minus Tully, it's all fractured nights, explosive diapers, and howls; plus Tully, it's the gentle nursing of a peaceful babe. Does the change have to be that drastic? (Anyone who kvetches about diapers, I would argue, knows very little about childcare. Diapers are the easy bit.) And, if paid help is the answer to a parent's prayers, where does that leave the vast majority of Americans who cannot afford a Tully of their own? You can feel the movie shrinking as these questions loom, and it all but collapses when Reitman engineers a final twist—the opposite of the twist in "The Sixth Sense," say, which enriched everything that had come before. Here the whole saga is hollowed out and thinned. It would have been better if Tully had floated away at the end, bearing an umbrella, into the clouds. That I would have believed.

How old is Moll Huntford (Jessie Buckley), the heroine of "Beast"? She is a grown woman, but her temper blazes like that of a child. Her hair is an unquenchable solar flare of copper curls, contrasting oddly with the demure summer dresses that she tends to wear. When she was thirteen, she was expelled from school for assaulting another pupil with scissors, and her glacial mother, Hilary (Geraldine James), treats Moll as if she were still in her teens. The movie begins at her birthday party, but nobody mentions her age, and she walks away in a snit, spending the evening getting drunk and dancing. Somebody says, "Moll's a wild one," and the longer the story continues the more you wonder how deep the wildness goes. She and Cathy, from "Wuthering Heights," would get on like a house on fire.

Michael Pearce's film is set on his native isle of Jersey, where the climate, mild and sunlit, is mocked by the tenebrous plot; three girls have been abducted and murdered, and a fourth is missing. "There's a killer stalking this island!" Hilary exclaims, in one of the script's more lumpen lines. She is understandably vexed when Moll stays out all night, and even more upset when she takes up with a rough local lad, Pascal Renouf (Johnny Flynn), a craftsman and a poacher. (Rabbit fanciers might want to steer clear of this movie.) His name is a reminder of Jersey's singular status, as a British crown dependency just off the French coast. Pascal claims to be descended from Norman nobility, and, during an awkward dinner at Moll's house, he says to her brother, "You're on my land." It's a joke, but only just.

Pascal, who has a dingy criminal record, is a person of interest to the police, but Moll finds it hard to stay away from him. If anything, she is fired up by his air of devilish danger, sensing a kindred spirit, and what gives "Beast" its edge, and its slash of black comedy, is that you can't decide to whom the title refers; the lovers are not the only contenders. As for the identity of the killer, Pearce pays little heed to the progress of the murder mystery. There *is* mystery here, but it emanates from Moll, the root of whose rage remains unexplained, and who will not be pinned down in any way. Even when badly hurt, she rises to her feet like a Fury.

All this is a far cry from "War and Peace"—the television version from 2016, that is, in which Jessie Buckley played Princess Marya Bolkonskaya. It's an almost impossible part: Marya is a nonpareil of Christian patience, radiating moral and practical virtue, yet Buckley somehow gave life to the role without drooping into sanctimony. Of all the cast, she seemed the truest to Tolstoy, modestly approaching his ideal of goodness, so it's disconcerting, to say the least, to observe her, as Moll, sliding headlong in the other direction. "Beast" is at its best when Buckley is at her most undaunted, showing us Moll at her most extreme—when she lies down by moonlight, for instance, in the shallow hole where a murder victim was found, beside a potato field. She gathers the earth around her, like a blanket, and fills her mouth with soil. We feel that we are witnessing some ancient rite, unconnected with this modern crime. Then, there is the extraordinary moment when Moll, harried by two solid men, turns and roars at them, so fiercely that they recoil as if confronted by a tiger. You half expect her to lash her tail and slink back into the woods. ♦

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Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by P. C. Vey, must be received by Sunday, May 13th. The finalists in the April 30th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the May 28th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“ ”

THE FINALISTS



"I have kind of bad news about the orchestra."
Arthur Braustein, Brookline, Mass.

"This time I'm going to teach you how to tune it yourself."
Maggie Symington, Rochester, N.Y.

"I know you're discouraged by the turnout, but I think it's the venue."
Nathan Grimley, Wilmington, Mass.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"It's a textbook case—depending on which state your textbooks are from."
Michael Boring, Brooklyn, N.Y.


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